A Case Study on the Experience of Cultural Immersion in the Development of Multicultural Competency in Graduate-level Counseling Students

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
The Patton College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Danielle L. Geigle
April 2017

© 2017 Danielle L. Geigle. All Rights Reserved.
This dissertation titled

A Case Study on the Experience of Cultural Immersion in the Development of
Multicultural Competency in Graduate-level Counseling Students

by

DANIELLE L. GEIGLE

has been approved for
the Department of Counseling and Higher Education
and The Patton College of Education by

Mona Robinson
Professor of Counseling and Higher Education

Renée A. Middleton
Dean, The Patton College of Education
Abstract

GEIGLE, DANIELLE L., Ph.D., April 2017, Counselor Education

A Case Study on the Experience of Cultural Immersion in the Development of Multicultural Competency in Graduate-level Counseling Students

Director of Dissertation: Mona Robinson

The number of Americans who belong to ethnic and racial minority groups in the United States has grown tremendously during the last decade. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, in the year 2000 there were approximately 36.4 million African Americans, 35.3 million Hispanic Americans, and 11.9 million Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, making up approximately 31% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2000). These statistics are expected to continue to rapidly increase and experts project that by the year 2050, Americans of ethnic racial minority groups will comprise approximately 54% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Research shows that there is a lack of multi-culturally competent mental health professionals currently practicing across the U.S. despite the need (Atkinson, Morten & Sue 1989). The shortage of adequate culturally-competent counselors and other mental health professionals has resulted in serious problems that could affect the overall economic and social well-being of the entire U.S population (Leong & Less 2006; West-Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta & Templeton 2011; Fouad & Arredondo 2007; Zhon, Siu & Xin 2009). For this reason, the mental health profession has called for a major education reform for counselors-in-training, and graduate counseling programs are now feeling the pressure to prepare their students to work in a culturally diverse world (Brown & Minor 1990; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009). While most graduate programs offer at least
one multicultural counseling course (often in order to meet professional accreditation and ethical standards), there remains no research-supported consensus as to how best train counselors for work in multicultural practice (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Ponterotta, 1996). Furthermore, graduate programs have been considered “marginal at best” for delivering what might be considered an effective training program (Ponterotto, Alexander & Greiger, 1995). The purpose of this qualitative study is to 1) identify the experiences of graduate-level counseling students participating in an international cultural immersion program and 2) understand how such experiences may change or alter the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with master’s and doctoral level counseling students, data was gathered to inform best-practice in Counselor Education programs and the counseling profession in an increasingly diverse world, and to lead the development of another tool for preparing students to gather the cross cultural, knowledge, awareness, and skills needed to work effectively with people of other cultures and ethnicities.
Dedication

To my father, for teaching me the true meaning of dedication,

and to my grandmother,

whose unconditional, love, support, and generosity

made completion of this work possible.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my dissertation committee members: Dr. Adah Ward-Randolph, Dr. Valerie Conley, and Dr. Nikol Bowen, for their insightful comments, encouragement, and assistance, and a very sincere thank you to my dissertation chair and mentor, Dr. Mona Robinson for her incredible patience, motivation, support, and guidance. Lastly, special recognition is credited to Dr. Yegan Pillay, who afforded me to the opportunity to experience first-hand the beauty of the people and culture of South Africa, which I shall never forget.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Approach</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Study</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Review of Literature</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Competency</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Immersion</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Knowledge, Awareness, and Skills</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Research Approach and Procedures</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Selection</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of Participants</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviewing</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Electronic Consent Form………………………………………………………….242

Appendix C: Interview Guide……………………………………………………………………245
List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants..................................................128

Table 2: Summary of Emerging Themes............................................................133
List of Figures

Figure 1: Counseling Program Multicultural Competency Checklist................37

Figure 2: Multicultural Competency and Corresponding Themes.....................132
Chapter 1: Introduction

The number of Americans who belong to ethnic and racial minority groups in the United States has grown tremendously during the last decade. In 2000, American and ethnic racial minorities accounted for approximately 31% of the US population and it is projected that by the year 2050 ethnic racial minority groups will make up nearly half of the American population (United States Census Bureau, 2008). If this projection reigns true, immigration will account for almost two-thirds of the nation’s population growth with one-quarter of all Americans being of Hispanic origin and almost one in ten Americans of Asian or Pacific Island decent.

Due to the growing recognition of the dramatic demographic transformation of contemporary society in the US, in addition to other factors such as the advancement and development of modern technologies, people today of all countries are immersed “ever more deeply in a social world, and [exposed to] more and more opinions, values, and lifestyles of others (Mather, Karbley, & Yamamoto, 2012, pg. 49). Given this, it is well recognized in counseling literature that a fundamental quality of an effective counselor is the ability to empathize with the experiences of a client, despite potential cultural differences and to meet the personal needs of people from different cultural, ethnic, racial, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds (Anderson & Cranston–Gringas, 1991; Canfield, 1992a; Sue, 1991).

Problem Statement

Given the substantial population growth of ethnic and racial minority populations, it can also be expected that the number of the current 54 million Americans who have a mental or physical disability will also increase, further indicating a need for practicing
counselors who are competent with working with individuals of diverse cultures and ethnicities (McNeil, 2001). Counseling literature has consistently cited this problem and has indicated a demonstrated abundant lack of multicultural competence amongst counseling professionals dating as far back as the 1980’s and the ability for counselors to meet the psychological needs of ethnically diverse groups in the future remains questionable. For example, research has shown that members of minority groups underutilize mental health services and they tend to terminate counseling after one session at a significantly higher rate than do individuals from the majority culture. Also, in comparison to other ethnic groups, Asian Americans are more reticent about disclosing psychological difficulties and show the longest delays in seeking mental health care from professionals (Atkinson, Morten & Sue 1989; Heppner & O’Brien, 1994; Sue & Sue 1990; Zhon, Siu, & Xin 2009). There are several justifiable reasons as to why populations such as Asian Americans and other minority groups are underutilizing mental health services, terminating their services early in the therapeutic process, and/or failing to seek mental health care altogether.

First, the concept of acculturation can play an important role in the seeking of mental health services among minority populations. Acculturation may be defined as the degree to which immigrant or minority populations identify with the mainstream dominant culture and the extent to which they have integrated the dominant culture into their lives (Leong & Lee, 2006). Over the years, theoretical models of acculturation have been developed and revised. Early theories of acculturation used a unilinear conceptualization of acculturation, based on the assumption that as ethnic racial minorities adjust to and attempt to internalize with the dominant or host culture,
maintenance and ties to one’s own culture of origin are weakened (Ryder, Alden & Paulhaus, 2000). In this unilinear model, varying dimensions exist yet assimilation to the dominant or host culture is the only end outcome (Miller, 2007). In a unilinear model of acculturation, there are four stages that individuals may experience during acculturation: a) Separation, b) Marginalization, c) Integration, and d) Assimilation. Individuals in the separation stage value holding onto their original culture and avoid interaction with the dominant cultural group. In the Marginalization stage, individuals demonstrate little interest in maintaining their original culture while also developing an initial desire to build and develop relationships with individuals from the dominant culture. Individuals in the Integration stage of acculturation maintain cultural honor and integrity yet function in a larger social system of the dominant culture. Finally, during the Assimilation stage individuals demonstrate little desire to maintain their original cultural identity and actively seek to participate in the dominant culture (Berry, 1980). Literature suggests that a higher level of acculturation (e.g. those in the Assimilation stage) can lead to a higher recognition amongst minority individuals regarding a need of psychological services, help them develop a higher tolerance of stigmas associated with mental health illness, and encourage them to engage in more discussion of personal problems with mental health professionals including counselors (Tata & Leong, 1994). Therefore, it might also be said that vice versa could be true: a minority member who has difficulty identifying with the mainstream culture and integrating the dominant culture into his/her life may not recognize the need for psychological services or may be more reluctant to share his/her personal problems with mental health professionals.
Additionally, other cultural factors such as: a) communication barriers between counselor and client, b) culturally informed concepts of mental illness (presenting mental illness as a negative concept), c) culturally different coping styles, and d) differing cultural values have been found to have an impact on the practices of seeking professional help amongst international cultures (Zhon, Siu & Xin, 2009). Secondly, logistical barriers such as a lack of knowledge of mental health services available or a family’s inability to access mental health services due to geographic and economic realities (such as work commitments, lack of childcare, or lack of transportation) add to the list of difficulties that many minority populations face in attempting to receive mental health services. While the counseling field must take the aforementioned factors into consideration when attempting to understand why individuals of minority cultures and ethnicities fail to receive mental health services, research continues to suggest that the mental health training of its professionals is to blame. For example, the lack of cultural competence of mental health professionals has been considered a dominant reason that individuals from racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse groups underutilize counseling services (Atkins & Wright, 1980; Heppner & O’Brien, 1994; Jacobs, Wissusik, Collier, Stackman & Burkeman, 1992; Patterson, Allen, Parnell, Crawford & Beardall, 2000). In addition, it has been found that a lack of culturally sensitive mental health professionals, a lack of bilingual mental health professionals, and culturally inappropriate or culturally insensitive diagnoses and treatments also may be responsible for the delay in access to or lead to premature termination of therapeutic services (Chung & Lin, 1994; Uba, 1994; Zhon, Siu & Xin, 2009).
In response to these grave concerns, a new large movement or “fourth force in counseling” (p. 79) has encompassed the field (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991). This multicultural counseling movement reflects a distinct pattern of progress to move beyond a level of “professional entrenchment that frequently diminishes [counselors’] effectiveness in working with culturally diverse clients” (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991, p. 78). Within this movement, several notable developments have evolved within counseling training programs designed to “address some of the cultural, ethnic, racial, gender and class-related insensitivities of the counseling profession” (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991, p.78). Professional counselor organizations have attempted to resolve the issue of ill-prepared counselors though various means: the development of multicultural competency standards, the creation of training models for multicultural counseling, the development of instruments to measure multicultural competency including the Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-and-Skills Survey (MAKSS; D’Andrea, Daniels & Heck, 1991), the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994), and the Multicultural Counseling Awareness Skill-Form B (MCAS:B; Ponterotto, Sanchez, & Magids, 1991), in addition to mandates by agencies such as Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs and the American Psychological Association for graduate counseling programs to include formal coursework in multicultural counseling (American Association for Counseling and Development, 1987; American Psychological Association, 1990; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 1994; Heppner & O’Brien, 1994; Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992).
Despite the notable advancements that have been made by professional counseling agencies, organizations and researchers, many challenges remain. For example, while professional publications on multicultural counselor training have provided specific approaches and models for delivering training as well as paradigms for training counselors to work with specific minority clients, questions have emerged as to how to best facilitate multicultural competency training (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Heppner & O’Brien, 1994). While psychometric instruments have been developed, and evaluated to measure one’s level of multicultural competency, more research is needed as problems with reliability and validity are questionable (Ponterotto, 1996; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994). While graduate Counselor Education programs have incorporated at least one multicultural course in their curriculum (in addition to infusing aspects of multicultural issues into other courses, as required of CACREP 2016 standards), faculty who are attempting to prepare students in a diverse world are often unsure as to how to influence student development of multicultural competence inside the classroom (CACREP, 2016; Ponterotto, Alexander & Grieger, 1995). Experts have suggested that multiple instructional strategies are necessary to promote students’ development of multicultural competency in the classroom; however which strategies are the most effective remains in question. Unfortunately to date, there is no consensus as to how to best train counselors for work in multicultural practice and to prepare counseling students to work in a diverse world (Buckley & Foldy, 2000; Ponterotto, 1996; Roysircar, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke & Ota Wang, 1999).

For many students, developing multicultural counseling sensitivity and skills creates discomfort, fear, guilt, shame and ambivalence leading to varying degrees of
resistance and withdrawal in the classroom which can impede a students’ ability to learn. Furthermore, time restrictions in the classroom often do not afford students the opportunity to process and reflect upon such feelings they may experience during a multicultural counseling course, which can further hinder a student’s ability to develop multicultural sensitivity and skills (Alexander, Kruczke & Pontoerotto, 2005). Other factors may further complicate the ability for Counselor Educators to adequately train counselors to become multicultural competent such as: a) existing budget restraints within Counselor Education programs (preventing the accommodation of necessary expenses associated with providing multicultural training), b) a lack of minority representation within the campus, university, or counselor education program population, c) Counselor Education program curriculum weaknesses, d) few opportunities for students to work with racial and ethnic minority individuals during practicum and internship, and e) student personal biases’ and prejudices’ (Ponterotto, Alexander & Greiger, 1995).

To further complicate matters, even those graduate programs that have been able to overcome such barriers (and have been deemed “effective” in multicultural competency training) have yet to be empirically sustained (Manese, Wu & Nepomuceno, 2001). Similarly, while some programs have gone even further and developed their own training models in hopes of meeting today’s professional standards, research has yet to distinguish between those training models that are highly effective and those that are less effective (D’Andrea, Daniels & Heck, 1991).
Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and understand how cultural immersion plays into the role of multicultural competency training in the field of Counselor Education. At this stage in the research, multicultural competency will be defined as having: a) an awareness and knowledge of one’s own culture, beliefs, values, biases and attitudes, b) knowledge and awareness of others’ cultural values, customs, expectations, and worldviews, and c) the ability to acquire appropriate intervention skills and strategies for working with multicultural clients, as is described in the foundational model for multicultural competency by Sue, Arredondo & McDavis in 1992. Cultural immersion has a vague definition in the professional counseling literature, although frequently it is referenced as an aspect of study abroad in which students engage a form of experiential learning. Students enter into an unfamiliar environment in a manner of which they are required to function successfully under a unique set of conditions and norms different from their own culture, for the purpose of expanding their cultural awareness and to enhance their ability to empathize and work effectively with individuals of other cultures (Cook, Avrus & Bonham, 2011; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgado, Ishii, Gilbride & Stensrud, 2009). Cultural immersion requires direct, active participation of the student including assimilating into the new environment, integrating into the community and interacting with local people, and learning to understand the way others live including their ideologies, values, and ways of thinking.

By conducting this study, the researcher hopes to first identify what the experiences are of graduate level counseling students participating in cultural immersion: what they experience emotionally, physically, and mentally in relation to various factors
such as the study abroad program curriculum, opportunities to engage in community
service, participation in leisure activities, group discussions, reflections with peers on
experiences, and the ability to interact with individuals of the international country.
Through identifying such experiences, the researcher will further attempt to understand
how cultural immersion programs may change or alter the development of multicultural
competency. It is the belief of the researcher that students’ multicultural competency, as
explored through in-depth interviewing, will be changed through the experience of
participating in an international cultural immersion experience.

Research Design

Of the two types of research models used in the helping professions (i.e.,
qualitative vs. quantitative), a qualitative approach is used when the researcher wants to
gain a deeper, fuller, and holistic understanding of a social process, human interaction or
other complex phenomenon (Cherry, 2000; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006). Often,
qualitative research “inquiries into the stories of individuals to capture and understand
their perspectives” (Patton, 2015, p. 8). More specifically, qualitative inquiry “studies,
documents, analyzes and interprets interviews, observations and documents to find
substantively meaningful patterns and themes regarding a phenomenon of interest”
(Patton, 2015, p. 5). Additionally, one of the main premises of qualitative research is to
strive to avoid making premature decisions or assumptions about the study and to remain
open to the alternative explanations that are uncovered. This focus on discovery,
exploration and understanding is a main premise to conducting qualitative research,
whereas in quantitative methodology the researcher begins with a predetermined
assumption about the relationships among the data before collecting evidence (Gay, Mills
Qualitative methodology allows researchers to approach fieldwork without the constraints of predetermined categories which allow for depth and openness, while quantitative methodology requires that researcher utilize standardized measures in which the varying perspective and expiries of people are fit into predetermined categories thereby limiting opportunity for depth, discovery, and exploration (Patton, 2015; p. 22). In this sense, it may be said that qualitative research applies the inducting reasoning, off which requires finding relationships, patterns or themes that emerge from the data as opposed to deductive analysis where the data are analyzed according to existing framework (Patton, 2015).

Because qualitative research involves the careful exploration of various aspects of a phenomenon and is oriented in gaining an understanding, and due to its emphasis on discovery and exploration rather than the manipulation and control of variables, qualitative methodology has been advocated for in counseling research, as well as health, social science and education (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006; Heppner, Kivilighan and Wampold 1992; Hoshman 1989; Polkinghorne 1984). Due to the investigate nature, purpose and structure of qualitative methodology it is the best methodology for this study.

Participants

Potential participants were already known to the researcher, as a graduate of the Ohio University Counselor Education program and a former participant of the South Africa cultural immersion experience. The researcher had also remained in contact with several individuals from both the counseling program and/or from the cultural immersion experience via social media. For convenience and practicality, the research used snowballing (or networking) criterion sampling to recruit participants in this study, using
the social media website Facebook. An initial five participants were recruited. The final two participants were recruited using the snowballing method in which participants of whom had already verbally agreed to participate in the study sent an open invitation to others (of whom they knew) to participate in the study (Bowen, 2010; Bowen & James, 2014). A final total of seven participants were selected and recruited for this study. All participants attended Ohio University, located in Southeastern Ohio, at the time the cultural immersion experience occurred. Each participant engaged in a five-week cultural immersion program offered through the university’s Office of Study Abroad to study HIV/AIDS preventions and awareness initiatives in Africa. The cultural immersion experience took place in two different locations: Botswana (in the years 2008 and 2009) and South Africa (during the year 2011). The program leader for each cultural immersion experience is a current Associate Professor in the Counseling Department at Ohio University and a native of South Africa. Thus, despite that the cultural immersion programs occur over two different geographical locations and in different years, the program structure (in regards to academic curriculum, excursions and leisure activities, course requirements, living accommodations, etc.) remains similar in nature.

**Case Study Approach**

The term case study does not have clear unified definition in qualitative research. Patton (2015) defines a case study as the “focus of study” that “stands on its own as a detailed and rich story” about a person, event, activity or process (p. 259). Merriam (1997) describes the case study as a method of inquiry in which the researcher examines in depth an event, activity, process, or individual(s). Patton (2015) explains that the term may be used by researchers to refer to a “unit of analysis” (e.g., described as a individual
or group of people) or to a “theoretical construct” (e.g., described as an event, activity, or process) (p. 259). Patton (2015) further elaborates that the term case study can be used to refer to both a unit of analysis and a theoretical construct, as it is within this research study; the case or focus of study is both a) a unit of analysis (graduate-level counseling students participating in a cultural immersion program) and b) a theoretical construct (e.g. the process of development of multicultural competency through cultural immersion).

Additionally, Patton (2015) states that in case studies in which the unit of analysis is participants in a program (such as this study), the primary focus of data collection is then “what is happening to the participants in a setting” (p. 260). Such data that can be collected for use in case studies documents, observations, and/or interview data. Because the goal of qualitative research is “not just making sense of the world but also making sense of our relationship to the world and therefore discovering things…about some phenomenon of interest” (p. 521), the researcher must be able to accurately describe, explicate and interpret the participant’s experiences in a subjective manner (Patton, 2015). To explore the process of the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students participate in a cultural immersion experience, the researcher developed two questions for this study, as follows:

a) What are the experiences of graduate-level counseling students participating in an international cultural immersion program?

b) How do the experiences of engaging in an international cultural immersion program change or alter the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students?
Using semi-structured interviewing, the researcher developed and then used a pre-determined set of subject areas relating to the role of cultural immersion in the development of multicultural competency training to guide the interview questions. Areas addressed included various aspects of: a) the cultural immersion experience itself (e.g. what types of activities the participants engaged in, what experiences did participants have, how the participants functioned being in a foreign environment) and b) participants’ development of multicultural competency via the cultural immersion experience (e.g. any knowledge, awareness or skills gained from the experience that might enhance the participant’s capacity to work with people of South Africa or Botswana). Sample questions the researcher used to inquire about the cultural immersion experience itself are “What were the group/individual experiences that were most meaningful to you?”, “What general aspects of the study abroad experience did you like the most and why?” and “What were some of the most stressful moments in the study abroad trip?” Samples of other questions the researcher used to inquire about student development of multicultural competency development include “What did you learn about yourself (perspectives, biases, prejudices, values, beliefs, etc.) as a result of this study abroad experience?”, “How well would you say you know the culture of South Africa or Botswana after this experience?” and “How do you think your experience has influenced your work as a multicultural counselor?” (For a full list of interview questions see Appendix C).

Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and during each interview the researcher took written notes regarding personal thoughts, observations, reflections and reactions that occurred during the interview. This was done for two
purposes: a) to remain cognizant of personal biases, or thoughts regarding the experience and set these aside during data analysis so as to remain objective, yet also b) for the purpose of adding further data and potentially increased insight into the phenomena under study by remaining cognizant of participant’s behaviors, tone of voice, etc.).

After the data collection process was completed, the researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews and personal reflections and began data analysis process which included identifying, developing, and combining clusters of meaning from significant statements, quotes and phrases found in the interview data. Using participant quotes verbatim and the researchers understanding of the context relating to participant experiences an initial brief explanation regarding the phenomena was able to be provided, followed by a final culmination of students’ shared experiences of their development of multicultural competency while participating in a cultural immersion experience.

**Significance of Study**

By conducting this study, the researcher hopes to find that by participating in an international cultural immersion program that counseling students, regardless of their level of graduate-level training, will have gained a sense of multicultural competency that is unique from that of which might be attained through traditional, multicultural classroom teaching. By conducting in-depth, one-on-one interviews with seven, graduate level counseling students who participated in a five-week cultural immersion experience aimed at studying the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa and Botswana, the researcher hopes to identify what their experiences were and to understand how such experiences may have affected their development of multicultural competency (i.e., development of awareness and knowledge of one’s own culture, beliefs, values, biases and attitudes,
development of knowledge and awareness of the cultural values, customs, expectations, and worldviews of those in South Africa and Botswana, and acquiring the ability to acquire appropriate intervention skills and strategies for working with individuals of South Africa and Botswana).

Understanding how multicultural competency develops in counseling students is important because in today’s diverse society, counselors must be able to work effectively with individuals from diverse cultures. While research has shown that Counselor Education students may gain a sense of multicultural competency through cultural immersion experiences that is unique from traditional classroom methods, more research needs to be conducted in order to define what specific aspects of the cultural immersion experience influence this development. The researcher hopes to add to this gap in the professional literature by interviewing counseling students who directly participated in a cultural immersion experience and inquiring about their experiences so as to gather an understanding as to how such experiences may either hindered or influenced their own development of multicultural competency.

Overall, by identifying and understanding the experiences of students engaging in a cultural immersion program, it is the impression of the researcher that Counselor Educators may be better able to advance counseling students’ level of multicultural competence by either a) incorporating a cultural immersion program into their current program curriculum or by b) implementing various aspects, deemed most helpful by participants, of the cultural immersion experience into current program curriculum (for example, the opportunity to work in a community with members of a different culture or ethnicity). By providing such new opportunities, Counselor Educators may be better able
to further advance counseling students’ level of multicultural competency and students will be prepared to think and work globally in their future careers. If the way in which multicultural competency is being elicited in counseling students is changed in a manner that better prepares students for working in a diverse world, then the willingness of individuals of ethnic and racial minority populations in seeking counseling services may also increase; possibly serving an end to the significant underutilization of mental health services by individuals of minority populations.

**Limitations**

In this study, demographic differences across participants such as age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and educational level are collected however are not accounted for. Such factors could affect the findings and interpretations (for example, age may be a contributing factor as to deciding what types of experiences participants chose to engage in while abroad, previous experience in traveling abroad may be a contributing factor as to how to participants described, processed, and interpreted various experiences, and/or educational level may be a contributing factor in participants’ development of multicultural competency). Additionally, due to the lack of racial and ethnic diversity within this group of participants, the findings of this study may not be representative of most graduate counseling programs facilitating a cultural immersion experience.

Another limitation is that the data collected in this study is from the students’ perspectives only. The ability to collect, analyze and interpret faculty observations of students’ development of multicultural competency during the program might provide more insight into students’ actual development of cultural awareness, knowledge, and
skills. Furthermore, cultural immersion programs are varied across universities and discipline; factors such as length of stay, destination, and the amount of immersion in the host culture may affect findings. For example, a student staying in a foreign country for 10 weeks versus 5 weeks could have a greater opportunity to engage in more activities, events, and experiential activities which could also provide such students more time to develop multicultural competency and degree of assimilation. The vice versa might also be true in which a student staying in a foreign country for 10 weeks versus 5 weeks may actually have less opportunity to engage in activities, events, and experiential activities due to a less inclusive program structure. Also, a program destination that resides in a more “Americanized” area could attribute to less opportunity to develop multicultural knowledge awareness and skills.

Another limitation to this study is the fact that all participants are from the same Counselor Education program at Ohio University as the researcher. The researcher may have developed relationships of various levels with participants in the study, which may have affected participant responses as participants may have felt more or less comfortable in revealing sensitive thoughts, ideas or memories regarding the cultural immersion experience to avoid being judged. Also, the coordinator of the Botswana and South Africa cultural immersion programs is a faculty member within the Counselor Education program at Ohio University. Thus, participants may have been hesitant to speak freely and openly about their true experiences out of anticipation that any negative experiences they might express could be read by the program leader.

Additionally, studying other Counselor Education programs including those that are non-CACREP accredited, those that are located in significantly different geographical
locations, and those with a higher and/or lower enrollment of racially/ethnically diverse students would provide the field with more insight and a better understanding as to how such factors may affect multicultural competency development through cultural immersion. Also, additional research is needed to compare the effectiveness of experiential learning methods to ascertain which learning experiences are most efficient in enhancing multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students. Finally, not all Counselor Education programs can provide opportunities for students to participate in structured multicultural interactions in a natural setting given limited amount of resources, time, money, support, and student interest.

**Definition of Terms**

Acculturation: the degree to which immigrant or minority populations identify with the mainstream dominant culture and the extent to which they have integrated the dominant culture into their lives (Leong & Lee, 2006)

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS): The most advanced stage of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection; is defined by the development of certain cancers, infections, or other severe clinical manifestations (World Health Organization, 2016)

Antiretroviral Treatment: the combination of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs to maximally suppress the HIV virus, stop the progression of HIV disease, and prevents onward transmission of HIV (World Health Organization, 2016)

Afrikaans: the most prevalent spoken language of South Africa; participants in this study were exposed to the Afrikaans language during the cultural immersion program (The Online Encyclopedia of Writing Systems and Languages, 2015)
Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Other Related Educational Programs (CACREP): an accreditation program for graduate-level Counseling programs that serves the purpose of promoting continued development and improvement of counselor preparation programs and counseling professionals through the development and incorporation of standards and procedures dedicated to reflecting the needs of a dynamic and diverse society (CACREP, 2016)

Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE): an accreditation program for graduate-level Counseling programs that specialize in professional rehabilitation counseling with the purpose of promoting the effective delivery of rehabilitation services to people with disabilities (CORE, 2016)

CORE/CACREP Affiliation: a new process in which CACREP’s traditional program standards are revised into a newly developed model that adopts Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling program standards (implemented by CORE), requiring Counselor Education programs that are seeking accreditation to undergo a review process conducted jointly by CACREP and CORE (Counseling Today, 2013)

Cognitive Learning: a classified level of learning that includes gaining the skills of knowledge, comprehension and critical-thinking of a topic (Bloom, 1956)

Cultural Immersion: as a form of experiential education in which students enter into an unfamiliar environment, in a manner in which they are required to function successfully under a unique set of conditions and norms different from their own, for the purpose of expanding their cultural awareness and enhancing their ability to empathize and work effectively with individuals of other cultures (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delmado et al., 2011; Ishii et al., 2009)
Culture: a system of meanings and ways of life that are learned and/or shared by a group of people and transmitted from generation to generation (such as social norms, roles, beliefs and values) (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Herskovits, 1948; Rohner, 1984)

Culture Shock: an experiential aspect of study abroad in which students experience, “come to terms with” and “are encouraged to accept” the “unfamiliar norms, practices, and attitudes” of a foreign country, facilitating a deeper level of understanding into the perspectives and worldviews of others (Cressy, 2000, p. 47)

Ethnicity: a term referring to individuals from a specific population group who identify with one another based on common nationality or shared cultural factors including ancestry, religious faith, language and traditions (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Helms & Cook, 1999)


Graduate Students: Masters and Doctoral-level counseling students from a CACREP-accredited university specializing in the disciplines of school counseling, mental health counseling, and/or vocational rehabilitation counseling

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): a virus, spread through bodily fluids, that attacks the immune system by destroying cells critical for fighting off infections and diseases, potentially resulting in Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), (World Health Organization, 2016)

Multicultural Competency: having an awareness of students’ own culture as well as the knowledge of other cultures and the ability to acquire appropriate intervention
skills and strategies for working with multicultural clients (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992); counselors’ cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge are applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups (American Counseling Association, 2005).

Race: a population group that is believed to be distinct from other population groups based on the classification of humans according to biologically identifiable physical attributes (e.g. skin color, hair color, facial features, height, etc.) (Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi & Piazza, 1996).

Setswana: the second most prevalent spoken language in Botswana (Siyabona Africa, 2016).; participants in this study were exposed to the Setswana language during the cultural immersion program (The Online Encyclopedia of Writing Systems and Languages, 2015).
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Multicultural Competency

The development of multicultural counseling competencies. Over the past 30 years, increasing attention has been given to multicultural issues in terms of research, training, and practice (Manese, Wu & Nepomuceno, 2001). This trend began during the mid-1970’s when psychologists, sociologists and counselors began to recognize various cultural, ethnic, racial, gender and class-related insensitivities of the profession. Within Counselor Education programs these insensitivities were two-fold, demonstrated by 1) a lack of enrollment of counseling students who were neither White nor male and, 2) counselor trainees who being trained and taught by predominately White, middle-class male Counselor Educators. Naturally, the lack of diversity in Counselor Education programs was representative to that of the current counseling profession, wherein there was a clear under-representation of minority counseling professionals providing services to an ever-increasing number of clientele from diverse populations. Due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of other cultures, counselors resorted to applying their own lived experiences to the lived experiences of the client with disregard for the client’s unique cultural background.

The cultural encapsulation of the profession became so prevalent that in 1978 the Special Populations Task Force of the President’s Commission on Mental Health identified minority populations as both underserved and inappropriately served by the mental health system. Mental health professionals responded by seeking ways to transcend the obvious limitations within the field and did so by advocating for multicultural training within their designated professional organizations. At a conference
in 1974 the American Psychological Association (APA) became the first professional organization to address the issue by mandating university psychology departments to prepare students to function in multicultural and multiracial society. The APA further emphasized that working without the knowledge of best practices for such populations was deemed unethical (Fouad & Arrendondo, 2003; Korman, 1974). By the late 1970’s, approximately 1% of APA’s accredited psychology programs offered a multicultural course, covering a wide range of cultural and ethnic dimensions including gender, race, sexuality, religion, and social class status (Ponterotto, 1997).

The requirements set forth by the APA in the 1970’s set the foundation for the entire mental health field. During this time, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) joined forces with the American Personnel and Guidance Association (a pre-cursor to the American Counseling Association) which resulted in the establishment of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in 1981, which remains one of the major accreditation bodies for Counselor Education programs today (CACREP, 2014). In 1982 “the Education and Training Committee of the APA’s division of Counseling Psychology, consisting of members D. W. Sue et al. conceptualized three dimensions of multicultural counseling competencies: a) beliefs-attitudes, b) knowledges, and c) skills” (Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin & Wise, 1994, p. 138). These MCC’s were revised and ten years later by Sue, Arrendondo, and McDavis (1992), who made up the Professional Standards Committee of the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (as cited in Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin & Wise, 1994). They introduced three “general cross-cultural counseling characteristics: a) counselors’ awareness of their own assumptions, values, and biases; b)
an understanding of the worldview of the culturally different client; and c) the
development of appropriate intervention strategies and techniques” (Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin & Wise, 1994, p. 138). Sue Arrendondo and McDavis (1992) stated that “First, a culturally skilled counselor is one who is actively in the process of becoming aware of his or her own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations, and so forth,” (p. 481). For example, counselors are aware of their own worldview and how they are a product of their own cultural conditioning and are further aware of how these factors may be reflected in the counseling process (Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1992). “Secondly, a culturally skilled counselor is one who actively attempts to understand the worldview of his or her culturally different client, without negative judgements” (p. 481). For example, counselors understand and share the worldviews of their culturally different clients with respect and accept such worldviews as legitimate (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). “Third, a culturally skilled counselor is one who is in the process of actively developing and practicing appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies and skills in working with her other culturally different clients” (p. 481). For example, counselors use modalities and define goals consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of the client (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992).

Today this model of MCC developed by Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1992) continues to define multicultural competency within the counseling profession and has had significant, ongoing influence upon counselor training, as evidenced by the fact that they are now considered an ethical standard that counselors must adhere to in practice (ACA Code of Ethics, 2005). In the proposition of multicultural competency standards,
Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1992) also issued “a call for action” (p. 483) to the field (more specifically, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development) to incorporate multicultural competencies into professional ethical standards as well as into the criteria for accreditation of graduate counseling programs, with hopes of fostering a more multicultural approach within counselor education and training and thereby producing counselors who are able to provide ethical and effective counseling to culturally diverse clients in the future (Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1992).

In an era of data-drive outcome measures, the development of multicultural counseling competency instruments, such as the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI) was an attempt to follow through with the 1982 recommendations. The MCI, a self-report measure of multicultural competency, was among three other proposed instruments including the Cross-Cultural Competency Inventory-Revised (CCC—R; LaFromboise, Coleman & Hernandez, 1991), the Multicultural Awareness Knowledge Skills Survey (MAKSS; D’ Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991) and the Multicultural Counseling Awareness Scale-Form B (MCAS-Form B: Ponterotto, Sanchez, & Magids, 1991) that were developed in association with the MCC’s.

Following the development of measurements to assess a counselor’s level of multicultural competency was the development of the Multicultural Competency Checklist in 1995 by Ponterotto, Alexander and Greiger designed for use by Counselor Education programs as a guide to improve their multicultural efforts. The Checklist includes 22 items organized along six major themes: minority representation in students and faculty, program curriculum issues, counseling practice and supervision, research considerations, student and faculty competency evaluation, and the physical environment
of the training program. The authors suggest that each of the aforementioned factors can have an impact (positive or negative) on the fostering development of multicultural competency in counseling trainees. For example, literature has suggested that minority students feel most supported in a program environment in which minorities represent at least 30% of the student and faculty population (Ponterotto, Lewis & Bullington, 1990). Thus, the first four items of the Checklist assess whether this 30% minority representation is met in Counselor Education Programs (as seen in Figure 1 below):

![Figure 1. Counseling Program Multicultural Competency Checklist (Ponterotto, Alexander & Griefer, 1995).](image-url)
By addressing each item on the Checklist, and whether this item is met within their current program, Counselor Educators have a better understanding of their ability to foster multicultural training on a more comprehensive basis (aside from the traditional method of adding a single multicultural counseling course) (Ponterotto, Alexander, & Greiger, 1995).

While such notable developments were intentionally designed to address some of the cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, and class-related insensitivities of the counseling profession, it became clear that the MCC’s competencies were geared towards “majority” counselors working with “minority” clients and did not represent the range of diversity that exists in the counselor client relationship (Ratts, Singh, Kent-Butler, Nassar-McMillan & McCullough, 2016). Furthermore, during this historical time, much controversy surrounded the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the term multicultural counseling. Those who adhered to a more exclusive perspective viewed multicultural counseling as limited to race or ethnicity (only those groups in society that were visibly different such as African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanics and Latinos). Those who adhered to a more inclusive perspective viewed multicultural counseling as always cross-cultural on the basis of other factors such as class, age, religion, sex, socioeconomic class that are also present in the counselor-client relationship. While the exclusive perspective limited multicultural counseling to race and ethnicity, the inclusive perspective diluted focus of major racial and ethnic concerns in the profession (such as power, privilege, racism and oppression) and perhaps afforded counselors the ability to avoid such topics in the counseling process (Fukuyama, 1990; Lee & Richardson, 1991; Locke, 1990; Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1992).
The recognition of the complex range of diversity that exists within counseling-client relationships, in addition to increased awareness that major racial and ethnic concerns of power, privilege, and oppression were not being addressed in the counseling relationship, led to the development of the Advocacy Competencies designed by an ACA-led taskforce in 2001 (Toporek, Lewis & Crethar, 2009). The Advocacy Competencies were designed with the hopes that counseling professionals could recognize how factors such as power, privilege and oppression negatively impacts human development and to make social justice advocacy a more integral force in the counseling process when working with clients (Ratts, DeKruyf & Chen-Hayes, 2016).

With the advent of social justice into the already existing multicultural movement in the counseling profession, as evidenced by the development of the Advocacy Competencies in addition to the pre-existing MCC’s developed by Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1992), there became a recognized need for the integration of these two perspectives (Ratts, 2011). In response, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development and American Counseling Association developed the Multicultural Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) in 2015 (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler & McCullough, 2015). The MSJCC provides a framework to implement multicultural and social justice competencies into theories, practices and research. The MSJCC recognizes the complex range of identities that clients and counselors bring to the relationship and the dynamics of power, privilege and oppression that influence the counseling relationship. Using the framework, counseling professionals must see client issues from a culturally contextual framework and recommend interventions that take
place at both individual and system levels (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler & McCullough, 2015).

The rapid growth of the multicultural movement, including the operationalization of multicultural counseling competencies and standards, provided the counseling profession with the means of rising above various forms of institutionalized racism that many counselors were/are either reluctant to address or simply unable to identify as being an inherent part of the professional training experience (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991). The fact that the multicultural counseling movement continues to advance and evolve, and as multicultural competency competencies (MCC’s) remain a central component to professional standards and ethical practice, may serve as an indication to current and future counselors that becoming culturally skilled is an ongoing process rather than a fixed, achievable goal; it is a process that will continue to evolve throughout one’s career. As Buckley and Foldy (2010) stated, “Much like a counselor’s belief that a person can grow and change is critical for promoting his or her client’s development, it is crucial that students in multicultural counseling courses hold an incremental understanding of multicultural competence” (p. 704).

**Educational approaches to multicultural counseling competency training.** Traditionally, multicultural education has been achieved by infusing material related to multiculturalism and diversity into graduate counseling courses however was limited to knowledge emphasizing racial and ethnic background (Cornelius-White, 2005; Ponterotto, Alexander & Grieger, 1995; Utsey, Gernat & Bolden, 2003). The development of multicultural counseling competencies and professional standards, in addition to the development of instruments for assessing multicultural competency,
provided the framework for multicultural counselor training and by the end of 1997, an astonishing 89% of Counselor Education programs offered at least a single multicultural counseling course (Ponterotto, 1997). While this was a significant increase from the 1% of programs offering multicultural training in 1970’s, multicultural competency since this time has gained so much attention that several training models have also been developed for being described as “effective multicultural counseling.” However, it remains unknown which of these models are more or less effective (Buckley & Foldy, 2010).

While the question remains as how to best promote multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students, Counselor Education programs must continue to adhere to the professional standards for multicultural practice (such as those set forth by CACREP Standards and the ACA Code of Ethics) which also includes utilizing appropriate methods for student progress evaluation (ACA Code of Ethics, 2005; CACREP Standards, 2016). Typically, Counselor Education programs utilize multiple methods for evaluation of student progress and learning, beginning with the admissions process and continuing throughout completion of practicum and internship experiences (Kelly, 2011). For example, during the admissions process students are often asked to participate in individual and/or group interviews facilitated by faculty members, in which students are asked several questions with the overall goal of screening for a student’s “dispositional potential” and risk for unprofessional behavior that may be inconsistent with CACREP standards, ACA Code of Ethics or other professional standards (Kelly, 2011, p. 113). Following the admissions process, students are then familiarized with the Counseling Program expectations and professional standards and ethical codes, (as often outlined in the program’s student handbook), and continually reassessed during first year
of academic coursework and throughout the practicum and internship stages. A final, comprehensive assessment is completed of student progress and performance in areas including academics, professional identity and clinical skills. Student progress evaluation may be discussed individually between the student and his/her advisor at any time, particularly if concerns arise regarding students’ engagement in behavior that may threaten the well-being of clients, and/or in preparation for graduation and entry into the professional setting (Foster & McAdams, 2009; Kelly, 2011).

Irrespective of accreditation and professional standards, Counselor Education programs are primarily accountable and responsible for ensuring that students are prepared and ready to work in a culturally diverse world. In the classroom, programs strive to provide multicultural training by teaching the three critical aspects of knowledge, awareness, and skills in at least one of the following ways: a) requiring a single multicultural counseling course, b) infusing multicultural training into other courses or c) combining both a single course with the infusion of multicultural aspects into other courses (Cates, Schaefle, Smaby, Maddux, & LaBeauf, 2007; Constantine, Ladany, Inman, & Ponterotto, 1996; D’Andrea, Daniels & Heck, 1991).

There are several purposes for the inclusion of a multicultural counseling course in Counselor Education programs. First, as Hood & Arceneaux (1987) suggest, the purpose of the multicultural counseling course is aimed at “replacing the false stereotypes with accurate conceptions and information” (p. 174). Other research shows that some courses intentionally present the information in such a way as to foster an elimination of any false information about different cultural groups that of which often develop in a students’ background or through the media (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991). A second
purpose of the single multicultural counseling course is to expand students’ cross-cultural knowledge base, which has been shown to be achieved through lectures, readings, and course content related to multiple perspectives, race and culture, as well as differing worldviews (Berry & Tischler 1978, Marden & Meyer 1978, Rich 1974; Simpson & Yinger 1978 in D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991). In this sense, the multicultural counseling course is designed to acknowledge and respect all cultural backgrounds and thus students’ own diverse backgrounds are also to be explicitly attended to during lectures and discussions (Fouad & Arrendondo, 2003). Buckley and Foldy (2010) state that, due to its inclusive nature, the multicultural counseling course is “designed to develop students’ awareness of their own racial and cultural heritage, biases, and assumptions in addition to building knowledge about other racial and cultural groups and the skills to work across cultures” (p. 692). Counseling literature has provided empirical evidence supporting such theories. For example, in a study by D’Andrea, Daniels and Heck (1991), it was found that counseling trainees who received multicultural training via a workshop had statistically significant gains in cultural self-awareness, knowledge, and skills than those trainees who did not receiving the training (Sodowsky, 1996). Neville et al., (1996) also examined the impact of a required multicultural counseling course on counselor trainee’s cultural competence. In this study the post-test means for self-awareness, knowledge and skills were significantly higher than pre-test means.

**Instructional strategies.** A multicultural training approach requires that an instructor adopt a broad range of teaching strategies that may appeal to the cultural orientation of students. In fact, experts have suggested that multiple instructional strategies are necessary to promote students’ multicultural competencies (Roysircar,
2004; Tomlinson-Clarke & Ota Wang, 1999). Today, Counselor Educators have wide variety of instructional strategies to achieve different multicultural training objectives:

1. **Traditional Strategies** may be used to provide specific information to increase students’ knowledge of cultural norms and values. Various cultural, gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic class differences may be examined throughout the semester. Examples of traditional learning strategies can include lectures, reading assignments, examinations, or research papers (Reynolds, 1995).

2. **Exposure Strategies** are aimed at increasing students’ sensitivity towards members of different cultural groups. Examples of exposure strategies include presentations by guest speakers from minority group populations. For example, D’Andrea (1990b) used a number of guest speakers from special populations to assist students in examining the relativity and variability of different developmental concepts in a Human Growth and Development course. (Mio, 1989; Neville et al., 1996; Ridley, Mendoza & Kanitz, 1994a)

3. **Participatory Strategies** can challenge students to examine their personal values, assumptions and potential biases through methods such as class discussions, simulations and role plays. For example, Arthur & Achenbach (2002) found that keeping a journal allows student to emotionally analyze information presented using self-reflection. In the past, exposure to participatory training strategies have predicted greater levels of comfort with inter-racial contact (Dickson, Jepsen, & Barbee 2008; Hubbell, & Ortega, 2005; Roysircar, Gard, Hubbell, & Ortega, 2005).
4. Experiential Strategies, according to Kolb (1984), are “a method for acquiring knowledge whereby the individual learns through lived experiences, experimentations, role plays, or viewing videos and film” (as cited in Villalba & Redmond, 2008, p. 264) Such learning strategies encourage interactive sharing and questioning in addition to self-reflection and introspection (Pederson 2000; Roysircar 2004).

While all the aforementioned strategies may be used in Counselor Education programs, experiential learning activities have long been emphasized in the counseling literature as a more effective means for enhancing student multicultural competency (D’Andrea, Daniels & Heck 1991; Evans and Larrabee 2002; Constantine 2001). Experiential learning encourages students to consider cultural contexts that influence their own behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs and to further consider the impact of such on their professional counseling role (Achenback & Arthur 2002; D’Andrea, 2005). Any knowledge gained about other cultures and ethnicities through traditional learning strategies (e.g., lectures) can be further reinforced by cultural immersion projects such as inviting diverse speakers into the classroom, role-playing counseling sessions with multicultural “clientele”, and/or by viewing impactful videos or movies that influence student reflection of personal opinions, biases or viewpoints regarding ethnically diverse cultures. In this sense, through self-reflection students are being taught to remove their cultural blinders which may interfere with their ability to perceive and make use of cultural information (Achenback & Arthur, 2002; D’Andrea, 2005). However, because increased levels of discomfort have been associated with developing self-awareness (i.e., anger, frustration, confusion), Nagda, Gurin & Lopez (2003) emphasize the importance
of incorporating debriefing sessions both before the experiential learning activity (to inform students of such potential risks) and after the activity (to allow counseling students time to process such self-awareness and ensure student well-being).

Furthermore, while experiential learning methods elicit development of self-awareness via reflection and introspection, and can often be feasibly adopted into traditional multicultural counseling coursework, some researchers believe that once students have engaged in self-reflection through experiential education they are merely at the starting point of becoming a culturally competent professional (Achenback & Arthur, 2002; Careney & Kahn 1984; D’Andrea, 2005; Dickson, Jepsen & Barbee, 2008).

**Challenges to multicultural competency training.** Research indicates that Counselor Education training programs generally are considered to be at an early stage of development regarding multicultural competency training and that the level of multicultural training that students have been receiving is less than adequate (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Mio & Morris, 1990; Smith, Rodriguez, & Bernal, 2012; Zalaquett, Foley, Tilotson, Dinsmore, & Hoff, 2008). For example, research suggests that there are very few (if any) Counselor Education programs that are sufficient in meeting all of the 22 competencies of the Multicultural Competency Checklist as proposed by Ponterotto, Alexander and Greiger (1995) and that programs following such competencies are more the exception rather than the norm (e.g., while the Checklist recommends a faculty minority population representation of 30%, current educational statistics indicate that 79% of full-time faculty in U.S. post-secondary institutions in the U.S. are Caucasian). (Constantine et al., 1996; Manese, Wu & Nepomuceno 2001; Ponterotto & Casas 1987; Quintant & Bernal 1995; Rogers, Hoffman & Wade, 1998; U.S. Department of
Education, 2015). Such inadequacies in multicultural competency training within Counselor Education programs may be attributed to several factors.

First, with the increasing number of multicultural counseling course offerings and training approaches in Counselor Education programs, questions have emerged about how to best facilitate multicultural counseling competence (Buckley & Foldy 2010). Secondly, while Counselor Education programs have produced much effort to ensure that counselors in training are developing the awareness, knowledge and skills needed for working effectively with a culturally diverse population, Pederson (2002) suggests that programs fail to provide an appropriate balance in training students equally across the three elements (e.g., a program may place superior emphasis on training students in the area of multicultural knowledge with less emphasis on multicultural skills), resulting in students who are ill-prepared for multicultural work. For example, he suggested that students who have been trained primarily in fostering multicultural awareness throughout their graduate studies, with diminished focus on acquiring multicultural knowledge, may struggle in the counseling process due to lack of knowledge regarding other cultures and have diminished ability to utilize skills and techniques applicable to various cultures. Vice versa, students who receive training that substantially focused on developing multicultural skills may demonstrate proficiency in ability to utilize such skills and techniques in the counseling process, however may be unaware as to whether they are actually helping the client improve due to lack of multicultural knowledge and awareness (Pederson, 2002). Third, although multicultural training in the classroom may pose many learning opportunities through challenging students’ personal cultural beliefs, it also presents students with many difficulties (Talburt & Stewart, 1999). For example, due to
the attention and value placed upon the development of self-awareness in multicultural competency training, students are encouraged to not only explore their personal attitudes, biases, and prejudices but they are also encouraged to address them (either verbally to peers in class discussion or in self-reflection). As cited in Buckley and Foldy (2010), Fouad & Arredondo (2003) and Jackson (1999) found that combining course content (such as readings and lectures) with personal racial exploration can “trigger a range of emotions in students including shock, guilt, anger, and shame and as well as defense mechanisms including resistance, denial, displacement, and intellectualization” (p. 696). Buckley and Foldy (2010) further report the findings of Jackson (1999), Ponterotto (1999), and Tomlinson-Clarke and Wang, (1999) of whom suggested that such emotional demands have led to an increasing number of students who have become resistant to the process of multicultural training, of which may lead to “withdrawal, passivity, and anger that can interfere with communication and learning in the classroom” (p. 696-697).

Other criticisms regarding the facilitation of multicultural counselor training include research by Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1989), Copeland (1982), and Margolis and Rungta (1986) who suggest that “a single course in cross-cultural counseling may accentuate certain subgroup differences in such a way as to lead to new forms of racism, and that “focusing on specific cultural, racial, and socioeconomic subgroups in the classroom could actually limit counselors’ ability to transfer their learning from one group to another” (as cited in D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; p. 83).

The fact that the Counseling field has failed to develop a single, effective model regarding best practice for multicultural training is evident by literature indicating that1) many of today’s counselors and mental health professionals have generally failed to
adequately meet the personal needs of many people from different cultures and ethnicities, b) that only a small number of students perceive themselves to possess high levels of competence in providing counseling services to racial and ethnic minorities, and c) that members of minority groups continue to underutilize mental health services (Allison, Crawford, Echemendia, Robinson, & Knepp, 1994; Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; D’Andrea, Daniels & Heck, 1991; Fredricksen-Goldsen, et al., 2012; Hughes, Harold & Boyer, 2012; Lee, 1991; Ponterotto & Casas, 1987; Sue and Sue 1990).

Some experts have suggested through their research that multicultural competence cannot be attributed to a single multicultural counseling course or textbook; that there are just certain aspects of another culture that cannot be learned through traditional learning strategies. All research tends to emphasize the importance of student engagement in didactic, practical experiences (such as outreach, advocacy and consultation) in addition to traditional classroom teaching, in order to produce outcomes in student development of which, thus far, have not been found as achievable (Leong & Paige, 2003). For example, Chao (2012) suggests that a student’s exposure to a wider variety of training methods including research, courses, workshops, service learning and guest lectures may expand their horizons in cross cultural counseling. He further suggests that if “multicultural training could deepen a journey of self-exploration and self-discovery, counselors might increase their understanding of their heritage and become culturally-competent counselors (p. 42).” In summary, direct, lived experience is the most vivid and lasting vehicle for memory and learning and one method for eliciting such a level of understanding is via cultural immersion (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004).
Cultural Immersion

What is cultural immersion? Cultural immersion has been defined as a form of experiential education in which students enter into an unfamiliar environment, in a manner in which they are required to function successfully under a unique set of conditions and norms different from their own, for the purpose of expanding their cultural awareness and enhancing their ability to empathize and work effectively with individuals of other cultures (DeRicco and Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgado et al 2011; Ishii et al. 2009). Students directly interact with persons in cultures that are different from their own and are able to experience “define and experience themselves on a daily basis” (Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994a, p. 235).

Cultural immersion experiences have held a particularly important role in Counselor Education and training, as they possess the capability of providing many unique benefits different from other types of multicultural training including fostering a global perspective, strengthening empathy, and improving cultural sensitivity and knowledge (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2012; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Smith, McAuliffe, & Rippard, 2014; Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007;).

Study abroad as a form of cultural immersion. While various forms of cultural immersion exist, study abroad programs (one form of cultural immersion) has a long history in higher education as the potential positive influence upon student development from studying abroad has become evident. International study abroad programs in higher education date back to the 1930’s when it was believed that exposure to, and prolonged contact with, native speakers was best way to acquire advanced proficiency in a foreign
language (Sepmeier, 1939). However, as global diversity and awareness continued to become more widely valued over time, institutes of higher education began to recognize the potential for study abroad programs to have a positive influence on students’ personal and cultural development. As a result, study abroad programs became prevalent at universities across the nation (Carlson, Burn Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1991). Today it is understood that study abroad experiences can have a lifelong impact on the student, despite the length of time spent abroad and targeted intention or aimed purpose of the program, particularly in regards to cultural knowledge and awareness, intellectual growth, openness to diversity and in acquiring a global perspective (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Matz, 1997; McCabe, 2012).

Research on study abroad programs has primarily been conducted within non-counseling disciplines (such as nursing, business and foreign language), however the counseling profession has long advocated for the theory that study abroad experiences have a profound effect in the development of counseling students’ multicultural competency, primarily as a result of the inclusive nature of experiential learning through aspects such as prolonged exposure and interactions with individuals of the foreign population, personal reflection and journaling, and other aspects such as group processing of student experiences (Burnett, Hamel & Long, 2004; Canfield, Low & Hovestadt, 2009; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Day-Vines, Barker & Exum, 1998; Fouad & Arredondo, 2003; Goessling & Melendez, 2012; Guth, McAuliffe & Michalak, 2014; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; McDowell, Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007; Mapp, 2012; West-Olantunji. Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011). In the next section, literature supporting that study abroad experiences are an effective method for eliciting
multicultural competency (specifically relating to student development of multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills) will be explored.

Development of Knowledge, Awareness, and Skills

**Multicultural knowledge.** Student development of multicultural knowledge that has been found to result from cultural immersion via study abroad includes: an increased knowledge of oneself (such as strengths and weaknesses), increased knowledge regarding one’s own culture (including a heightened sense of economic wealth and/or privilege) and an increased knowledge of personal biases, beliefs and attitudes regarding individuals of other cultures (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). Research regarding cultural immersion experiences has significantly supported the theory that student development of multicultural knowledge is changed through study abroad programs (as discussed below).

Self-awareness has long been an important component of personal and professional identity development, since it was first suggested by Carl Rogers (as cited in Seligman and Reichenberg) that self-awareness is a “personality dimension” reflecting emotional health that is a “characteristic to the fully functioning person” (p. 151). It is also considered a fundamental quality of well-functioning counselors and an important therapeutic aid, in addition to a primary principle in the ethical practice of counseling (Jennings & Skovhold, 1999; Mahoney, 1998; Rubin 2000; Schwebel & Coster, 1998; Wilson & Wilson, 1997). Initially considered an added benefit (aside from learning a foreign language), student development of self-awareness (defined as student insight into one’s inner self including one’s own thoughts, feelings, physiological responses) now is considered an inherent aspect of studying abroad and, more importantly, a precursor to student development of multicultural competency (Fouad & Arredondo, 2003; West-
Olantunji. Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011; Williams, 2003). In regards to using cultural study abroad experiences to elicit student self-awareness, Platt (2012) noted that “for many it is as if the experience acts as a mirror in which an increasing awareness of one’s own self and one’s own cultural context takes place (p. 354).” Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins and Hall (2014) adds that engaging in self-reflection in this manner leads to self-acceptance. For example, in their study examining the impact of a 3-week study abroad program in Belize, (in which counseling students engaged in a 7-day service-learning program that included providing professional sessions on trauma and self-care and individual and group counseling sessions in the education setting), participants discussed how their experiences influenced development of personal self-acceptance. For example, one participant stated:

I think that because of Belize and the people I took this trip with, that I am more understanding and more aware of myself. I’m aware I tune out much more than I should [and] I’ve learned that I need to learn more. Altogether this trip was amazing and I think I can be a better counselor now that I know myself better and have a better view of the world (p. 480).

Burnett, Hamel and Long (2004) also suggest that studying abroad emphasizes personal growth and change, as students develop newly formed perceptions of self in relation to others who are different from oneself as a result of prolonged exposure to the international population. Similarly, in one study by Themundo, Page and Benander (2007) that explored the impact of study abroad upon student and faculty development of cultural awareness and personal growth, faculty commented on how they learned more about themselves in terms of how controlling yet flexible, impatient yet tolerant, and
proud yet humble they can be. From this study, the authors also concluded that participants developed increased self-confidence and a deeper awareness of one’s own strengths and weaknesses as a result of learning how to function successfully in a strange environment different from one’s own.

The findings by Themundo, Page & Benander (2007) suggesting that self-awareness can be influenced through cultural immersion as a result of learning to function in a foreign environment, surrounded by a different culture and language with little or no opportunity to withdraw, is not a new concept. For example, Cressy (2000) suggested the physical and mental stressors associated with traveling abroad, such as language differences, disturbed sleeping patterns, transportation issues and adjusting to new living arrangements, can actually “shock” a student into a newly developed sense of self-awareness (a concept the author referred to as *culture shock*).

As Cressy (2000) suggests, *culture shock* may be the “instrument that paves the way for students to think critically about one’s own culture (p. 46).” The acquisition of cultural knowledge, including the ability to think critically about one’s culture in a manner that may lead to a changed, critical perspective, has been found to result from study abroad experiences (Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1990). For example, in a study by McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2012) that explored the transformative learning experiences of counseling students who engaged in a study abroad program to the Middle East or Asia, participants reported becoming better able to recognize, critique, and affirm their cultural values, norms, and practices. Experiencing and reflecting upon the differences between the norms and values of the foreign culture and those of their own culture afforded participants the ability to evaluate how their upbringing and society
made them the person that they are, as evidenced by participant responses that include “I learned a lot about who I am culturally (p. 371)” and “It causes a lot of reflection about my own context and my own process and my own journey in my own culture (p. 371).” Similarly, in the aforementioned study by Themundo, Page and Benander (2007) participants experienced a change in attitude and perceptions regarding their culture in a manner that is “near impossible to learn outside an immersion experience (p. 72).” Specifically, the authors stated that after finishing the study abroad program and returning home, participants commented on how little Americans actually know about other cultures and how their view of their home country was enhanced by seeing it from a new perspective.

Carlson and Widaman (1988) also investigated the effects of study abroad by comparing student changes in attitudes and perceptions regarding one’s cultural identity between two groups of students: those who spent their Junior year abroad in Europe and those who spent their Junior year on campus. Results from their quantitative study indicated that those students who studied abroad reported significantly more positive, yet also more critical attitudes toward their own country than did the comparison group. The authors explain that the one-year study abroad experience in Europe led to more mature and objective perceptions of the students’ home country. Talbut (1999) suggests that such critical thinking of one’s own culture, including the process of developing new and/or changing perspectives, poses both difficulties and learning opportunities for students engaging in study abroad experiences.

The ability to critically think about one’s own culture which supports cultural/ethnic identity development, has been explored throughout the counseling
literature. Specifically, scholarship surrounds the connection between cultural/ethnic identity development through engagement in cultural immersion experiences (including service learning and study abroad). For example, in the aforementioned study by Canfield, Low & Hovestadt (2009) that evaluated the impact of a two-week study abroad in Thailand upon graduate counseling student development of multicultural competency, the authors suggest that students’ experiences as outsiders or “foreigners” compelled them to examine their own cultural identities and assess how their particular world view might impact their assumptions about other people. More specifically, in a study by Day-Vines, Barker, and Exum (1998) it was found that a study abroad experience to Ghana in West Africa fostered a strengthened sense of cultural/ethnic identity for participating African American undergraduate college students. The authors used Phinney’s (1993) model of ethnic identity development in their study which includes three stages including: a) unexamined ethnic identity (individual has not engaged in exploration of ethnicity), 2) ethnic identity search/moratorium (individual actively seeks to understand the meaning of his/her ethnicity), and 3) achieved ethnic identity (individual is clear and confident about his/her ethnicity. Through their study abroad experience in Ghana, several students demonstrated acting at the third stage of Phinney’s (1993) model, as students not only were able to critically examine American cultural values (and note differences/similarities between the American and African American cultural groups), students also voiced the need to share their newly developed ethnic pride with others and continue to educate themselves on their African American heritage, indicating their commitment and confidence of their ethnicity.
The findings by Day-Vines, Barker & Exum (1998) are replicated in a later study by Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall (2014), that examined the impact of a 3-week study abroad experience to Belize upon graduate counseling students’ cultural self-awareness. In this study, all five participants expressed thoughts about their own cultural background and some expressed a desire to learn more about their cultural heritage in their journals throughout the duration of the trip. For example, one participant states early on in her journal entry that “Sometimes as an African American woman I feel as though I lack culture (p. 479).” Following a Creole culture experience, she wrote “I really enjoyed our Creole immersion experience at the House of Culture; however, it made me feel like I did have culture and that I do have history…I am glad to say that I am self-aware at this part of the journey (p. 479).” In another example, one participant wrote during the first week of the study abroad trip “I personal don’t feel like I have any cultural values (p. 479)” and at the end of the study abroad experience, the participant wrote “I learned and became a lot more aware of the cultures I identify with in my life and what area some of the driving forces behind how and why I identify (p. 480)” (Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall, 2014).

Some research suggests that studying abroad can elicit a positive change in the cultural perspective of students’ own culture. For example, American students may have an improved appreciation for the American culture after traveling abroad and experiencing the severities of a third-world economy, such as having a lack of food or water and other resources readily available. Students may have increased confidence in the American culture as they are realizing that, because they are Americans, they are better equipped to help communities in need by providing them with shelter, food, school
supplies, etc. Students may develop a greater sense of pride for being an American as they learn that many people in the foreign population speak the English language, appreciate American people, or have dreams and desires of traveling to America. For example, in the study by Themundo Page and Benander (2007) one participant noted feeling surprised that the group was thanked for American efforts and aid during World War II “even though not a single one of us was alive back then (p. 72).” In another study by Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004) participants indicated feeling grateful to be Americans with comments such as “I am very, very blessed to be an American (p. 159)” and “Our kids are not in a war zone. We’re protected from that (p. 159).”

However, research suggests that traveling abroad can also have a negative impact on one’s sense of cultural identity. For example, according to Themundo, Page & Benander (2007) the challenging of students’ personal cultural beliefs can cause them to become aware of the cultural encapsulation in which they were raised. Students may appreciate the American culture less as they learn, for example, that in the foreign culture the familial or community concept is more highly valued and appreciated. In the study by Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall (2014), participants compared the appreciation that individuals from Belize have for their culture and lifestyle to the lack of appreciation Northern Americans have for their culture. For example, one participant reported “Sometimes in the states we tend to lose the human touch. People are so consumed with themselves and with their own problems and daily tasks, that they don’t even take a moment to appreciate the company of a newcomer (p. 478).” This participant, during week four of the five-week experience, wrote “In the States we often brag about our accomplishments to gain the respect of others and/or to one-up [sic] others
as well; Belizeans don’t seem to feel the need to stroke each other’s ego the way we do (p. 478).”

Students responses in the aforementioned study indicate that students can begin to have feelings of guilt and privilege as they witness the real-life struggles of hunger, poverty, or human trafficking in the foreign culture and such ramifications have been echoed in other studies evaluating the impact of study abroad. For example, in the study by Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004) students voiced animosity towards the American culture upon their study abroad experience in Ireland as indicated in comments such as “The attitude that I encountered when I came back to this country was rude (p. 159)” and “I realize that we are spoiled. We are a spoiled country (p. 159).” In the study by McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2012), participants made references to their personal experiences with feeling privileged as an American while abroad, including “being allowed to enter an expensive hotel to use the bathroom when locals were turned away and being treated differently by members of the host country (p. 370).” Participants’ increased recognition of American power and privilege, and first-hand experiences of such privilege, was associated with feelings of guilt and discomfort, in addition to accountability and social responsibility (McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez, 2012).

For example, one student voiced

That seemed to be a big problem for us, just not knowing what to do [in response to poverty and begging]. Some people decided to give money. Other people decided to just buy food and hand out food …[I experienced] the inner conflict of not wanting to deal with the guilt of even seeing the people who are in poverty. (p. 371)
Similarly, Canfield, Low & Hovestadt (2009) evaluated the impact of a two-week study abroad in Thailand upon graduate counseling student development of multicultural competency. The program consisted of student interaction with the Thai people in both rural and urban settings. The authors suggest that, despite the relatively limited cultural immersion with the Thai community outside the urban tourist areas, participants expressed a common theme of a heightened sense of their own economic privilege and how such privilege might be perceived by others. Students reflected feelings of discomfort such as one student’s reflection:

We traveled around on a big fancy bus, stayed in five star hotels, and had all the Thai buffet that we could eat. Meanwhile, there is the smell of urine and fish right across the street. I felt as though we stood out with all of our privilege and that was unsettling at times (p. 320).

Thus, while students may express increased confidence and commitment to their cultural/ethnicity, or have an increased understanding and appreciation for their culture/ethnicity, students may also perceive their culture in a newly negative light. (For example, American students traveling abroad may have changed perceptions of America as a wealthy, ego-centric country as a result of their experience).

Students also have pre-existing stereotypes and false ideas regarding other cultures, in addition to personal biases, beliefs and prejudices regarding other cultures, which often develop through students’ social background or upbringing and through the media (Hood & Arceneaux, 1987; D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Roysircar (2004) notes that students often do not consider such factors of prejudice and discrimination (including their positions on race, ethnicity, culture) until
they are required to directly engage in activities that are designed for them to reflect on these factors. Thus, before students even travel abroad they may have little insight or recognition regarding the personal beliefs, perceptions, and ideas about the international culture they are about to immerse themselves within (e.g. the geographical make-up, economic conditions, taste of the food, even personal characteristics such as dress, language, and attitudes of the international people). This becomes problematic when students then become immersed in the foreign culture and are faced with the challenge of confronting their pre-existing beliefs, values, and cultural biases. For example, as students learn that their personal beliefs, biases, and prejudices were false or inaccurate, students may experience feelings of confusion, frustration and resistance (Alexander, Kruczke & Pontoerotto, 2005; Fouad & Arrendondo, 2003; Ishii et al., 2009; Jackson 1999; Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall, 2014).

While such confusion, frustration and resistance in the classroom can impede student development of multicultural competency setting (due to time limitations), study abroad experiences (in which students have extended contact and prolonged interactions with members of host country) enables students move past resistance to reflection which allows them to identify source of their values and biases (Themundo, Benander & Page, 2007; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; West, Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011). Students become more familiar with the stereotypes and the views that they hold about peoples who are different from themselves and as a result, their perceptions are broadened and their worldview is expanded (Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall, 2014).
For example, West-Olantjuni et al. (2011) evaluated the impact of six counselor-trainee’s development of self-awareness via a four-week international immersion program to South Africa. Students identified feelings of guilt, frustration and confusion during their immersion experience, prominently when visiting areas of South Africa affected by hardship and oppression. Participants appeared “stuck” (p. 342) as they articulated their frustrations and irritations, which were paired with statements about guilt and privilege given their first-hand experiences with oppression. However, the authors found that through the practice of journal writing and group reflection, students were able to process their feelings associated with such experiences and move towards an increased level of self-awareness, thereby “setting the stage of open dialogue and discovery (p. 343).” Brown (1995) also suggests that program leaders also have a critical role in this process, as encouraging and validating students’ reflections of their experiences is considered a necessary type of support for students to reduce or eliminate such biases and prejudices (Brown, 1995).

Similarly, Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) evaluated the effects of a service-learning program upon counseling student development of cultural competency. In their study, a total of 14 students from across the Counseling, Psychology and Education disciplines worked with community members and their families affected by HIV and/or AIDS through non-profit community organizations. The authors found that daily “cross-cultural (p. 169)” contact with community members challenged students’ preconceived assumptions, judgements and stereotypes regarding the people of the South Africa, and students reported that they began to recognize and dispel myths about the people of South Africa.
Having the ability to identify and recognize false or inaccurate personal beliefs, biases, prejudices and stereotypes is not only important for expanding one’s worldview and global perspective, but it is also necessary for changing one’s behavior and actions. For example, in the aforementioned study by Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall (2014) that examined the impact of a 3-week study abroad experience on graduate counseling students’ cultural self-awareness, the authors make note that all five participants exhibited their own forms of racial/cultural discrimination and prejudice, which was defined as “biases against other groups and cultures based on their racial identity (p. 476). The participants further noted in their written journals that discrimination and prejudice impacted their ability to fully immerse themselves in the foreign culture. Students acknowledged their awareness of discriminatory thoughts early during the study abroad trip, including their efforts to overcome them while further recognizing the impact that such thinking had upon their behavior, specifically in regards to communicating with local community members. For example, one student voiced:

I had to check my feelings today at the hospital as I feel that some of my classmates reminded me of how white people talk to minorities. Using words like “you all”, “they”, “them” really rubs me the wrong way and in my opinion is a sure way to turn people off (p. 477).

These statements indicate that students’ newly developed recognition of their personal discriminations and prejudices is a result from their experiences studying abroad; such insight may have never occurred had students’ not engaged in such a learning opportunity. Perhaps even if students did have this level of self-awareness pre-
departure, it is not likely that could anticipate the extent as to how such discriminatory thoughts might affect their interactions with natives while abroad.

The findings from the literature aforementioned support what scholars in the counseling (and related) professions have long suggested: a) counselors must develop multicultural knowledge (i.e., knowledge regarding oneself, one’s own culture, and personal biases, beliefs and attitudes regarding other cultures) in order to become multiculturally competent counselors, and that b) study abroad is one form of cultural immersion that can expand student development of multicultural knowledge (Fouad & Arredondo, 2003; Jennings & Skovhold, 1999; Mahoney, 1998; Rubin 2000; Schwebel & Coster, 1998; West-Olantunji. Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011; Williams, 2003; Wilson & Wilson, 1997).

**Multicultural awareness.** In addition to gaining multicultural knowledge, students must also develop an awareness and knowledge of others’ cultures (including their cultural values, customs, expectations, and worldviews) to set the foundation for working effectively and competently with individuals of diverse populations (Bemak & Chung, 2004; Sue, Arredondo and McDavis, 1992). Research supporting the theory that counseling student development of multicultural awareness can be influenced through study abroad experiences is discussed.

Literature on study abroad programs suggests that such experiences can increase student cultural awareness through students’ first-hand exposure to cultures and ethnicities. For example, Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004) explored the long-term effect of a 2-week study abroad program to Ireland on both undergraduate and graduate level students in counseling, education, sociology, psychology and other related disciplines.
While abroad students engaged in seminars and discussions led by Irish scholars and community workers regarding sociocultural issues, including peacemaking, community activism, and crisis management. The authors found that the program was helpful in increasing student’s knowledge regarding Ireland’s culture. For example, themes that emerged from the four focus groups indicate that students learned several factors regarding the Irish: that the Irish people value education, that the Irish are strong supporters of citizen’s rights, that religion is a characteristic of the Irish people and culture, and the history of the Irish (including past conflict between Ireland and Northern Ireland). In a follow-up study, Guth, McAuliffe and Michalak (2014) expanded upon the findings of Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004) by further examining the impact of a 2-week study abroad experience at the Counseling and Diversity Institute in Ireland. At the institute, students learned about the counseling profession in Ireland from leaders in the Irish mental health field, studying core multicultural issues with nationally-known counseling faculty, and through visiting Irish counseling agencies and social programs. From their pre and post-test quantitative study, the authors found that students perceived themselves to be more knowledgeable about the culture of Ireland by the end of the study abroad experience.

Research also suggests that study abroad opportunities can provide students with the unique capability to relate to people across differences and to intimate, meaningful interactions with individuals different from oneself, and such interactions have been deemed an essential aspect for student development of cultural knowledge and for closing societal gaps that separate people (such as race, socioeconomic class, and culture) (Barden, Shannhouse & Mobley, 2015; Boyle-Baise 2002; Mather, 2008; Monard-
Weissman 2003; O’Grady, 2000). For example, in the aforementioned study by West-Olatunji et al. (2011) regarding the development of multicultural competency in counselor trainees engaging in a six-week study abroad experience in South Africa, participants demonstrated an increased level of knowledge regarding the culture that exists within South Africa through the interactions and connections they developed with community members, as they were able to “witness the community’s authentic voice (p. 344)” through exposure to native practices such as indigenous healing, singing, dancing, meditation and prayer. This echoes findings by Themudo, Page and Benander (2007) who reported that cultural immersion allows students to “follow one’s curiosity into a new place” and allows opportunity for “learning a new way of life” and “experiencing the kindness of strangers (p. 73).” Scholars and Counselor Educators suggest that encouraging students to involve themselves in the rich cultural traditions, languages, experiences and nuances of the host country is paramount to their development of cultural knowledge (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). The authors also suggest from their study that students’ prolonged contact in diverse communities can help counseling students to both understand and appreciate the struggles and assets of diverse communities. By becoming informed of their local surroundings and communities, and by having daily interactions with community members, students learned and were able to voice the social, political and historical aspects of South Africa and were able to reflect on the environmental and structural issues that members belonging to the South African community face.

Similarly, findings from the aforementioned study by Carlson and Widaman (1988) that investigated the effect of studying abroad on college students’ attitudes and
perceptions, it was found that those who study abroad demonstrate higher levels of international political concern and cross-cultural interest than the comparison group of students who did not study abroad. Specifically, the authors suggest that, as a result of the inclusive nature of the study abroad experience, students were better equipped to understand the unique social, political, cultural, environmental (and other) issues that individuals of diverse populations face. They further suggest the study abroad program emphasized a community-centered learning approach in which the principles of inclusion, mutuality and collaboration support the premise of “working inside the community rather than working for the community”. Most importantly, students were able to consider how these factors related to their own personal role in the community building process (Carlson & Widaman, 1988).

Findings from Smith-Augustine, Dowden Wiggins and Hall (2014) replicate the findings from Carlson and Widaman (1988) suggesting that students can learn to recognize the cultural value of inclusion and collaboration. In their study regarding the impact of a 3-week study abroad experience to Belize in which counseling students engaged in a 7-day service-learning program in the educational setting, three of the five total participants recognized the collectivist nature of the various cultures in Belize. For example, after being invited to a teacher’s home for lunch during the service-learning experience, one participant wrote in her journal:

Whether the teacher’s intentions were to simply feed us lunch or to actually give us a look into where she lived, her invite impacted me tremendously. She showed me how it feels to be a part of a more collectivistic cultures who cares for and looks out for one another. (p. 478).
Students in this study also recognized the strong sense of cultural pride and appreciation that the Belize people had for their country, and how such cultural pride and appreciation plays a role in the counseling process. For example, one participant mentioned “I learned the importance of culture this week. I learned how reinforcing someone’s culture can create a sense of pride and unity in people, as opposed to angst and separation (p. 477).”

These findings further support existing research indicating that counseling students and trainees must develop multicultural awareness (i.e., an awareness and knowledge of other cultures) in order to become effective, multiculturally competent counselors; and that study abroad experiences should include both experiential learning and didactic learning methods to expand student development of multicultural awareness (Bemak & Chung, 2004; Sue, Arredondo and McDavis, 1992; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).

**Multicultural skills.** Increased cultural knowledge and advanced multicultural awareness are important aspects for student development of multicultural training, as these factors are the foundation for developing the necessary therapeutic skills for working with individuals of other cultures and ethnicities (Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1991). Multicultural counseling skills are often conceptualized as a construct distinct from general counseling skills and have been recognizably defined as “developing and practicing appropriate, relevant and sensitive intervention strategies and skills (p. 481)” (Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1991). Research indicates that cultural immersion through the form of study abroad can influence student development of multicultural counseling skills in a manner that will assist students to serve a culturally diverse population in their future profession (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Neito, 2006).
Additionally, literature suggests that cultural immersion (in the form of study abroad experiences) can prepare trainees to understand the influences of culture on behavior and emphasizes the need for counseling professionals to be culturally sensitive (Chung & Bemak, 2002; Kim, 2015;). Becoming culturally sensitive encompasses developing the awareness, knowledge, and cognitive ability as it relates to various cultures (Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angelmeler, & Zenk, 1994b). For example, in the aforementioned study by Canfield, Low & Hovestadt (2009) in which graduate level counseling students participated in a 2-week study abroad program in both rural and urban areas of Thailand (in which participants engaged in group processing of individual and group experiences), participants expressed a collective belief that the experience had made them more culturally sensitive and helped them become a more culturally competent counselor (Canfield, Low & Hovestadt, 2009). Similarly, in the aforementioned study by Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall (2014), all five students participating in the 3-week study abroad program to Belize expressed a heightened sense of cultural sensitivity or expressed feeling that they were not as culturally sensitive as they had previously thought as a result of the experience abroad. For example, in the first week of the study abroad experience, one participant wrote:

This week has made me realize that I complain too much without being sensitive to the condition of those around me. I don’t think about how people may be offended by my complaining about something that could also be affecting them but in a sensitive manner (p. 478).

Another student wrote “the past 6 days have been learning experiences and eye openers, as I may not be as culturally sensitive as I thought I was (p. 478)” and a third
participant stated “I think I am more sensitive to people’s feelings than before. I feel Belize had a big part in that. I realized how judgmental I can sometimes be (p. 479)”

Specifically, an additional critical aspect to demonstrating cultural sensitivity is the ability to identify one’s worldview as distinct from the worldview of others (Sue & Sue, 1999). In the aforementioned study by McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2012) the authors found that all 8 participants reported experiencing a change in their worldviews, in which participants discussed seeing the world differently and recognizing different perspectives and ways of life. For example, one participant commented “I am able to see different worlds in a completely different worldview…It is just realizing our way is not necessarily the right way or the wrong way…I am more open-minded now (p. 368)”. Participants also made specific references to having a deeper understanding, acceptance and being more open to the perspectives and worldviews of others. More importantly, all participants were able to identify how their experiences abroad expanded their thinking in a manner that strengthened their ability to work cross-culturally.

The findings from the McDowell, Goessling and Melendez (2012) study supports existing literature that suggests via cultural immersion, students are confronted by a widening of horizons in which they develop an expanded vision of the world, an increased ability to understand varying cultural contexts and develop non-judgmental perspectives and cultural sensitivity (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimovicz, 1990; Carlson & Widaman, 1988, Lambert, 1989). Seen from this perspective, studying abroad has been referred to as a unique learning opportunity for students who, through the course of meeting new people from diverse cultures and experiencing the challenges of foreign travel, have an expanded understanding of such cultures in a manner that will allow them
to be more effective in interacting and effectively communicating with individuals of such diverse populations in the future (Franklin, 2010; Kim, 2015). Additionally, there is little doubt among educators in counseling and related fields about the effectiveness of studying abroad, as this method of cultural immersion has been proven effective in helping students obtain cultural knowledge and to enhance those skills deemed necessary for working cross-culturally (Kim, 2015). However, literature indicates a consistent lack in counselors’ ability to incorporate multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills into practice and one possible explanation may be the training received in Counselor Education programs.

**Cultural immersion versus traditional classroom methods.** Research has advocated the theory that cultural immersion is an effective way of teaching the aspects of knowledge, awareness, and skills in the development of multicultural competency in a manner that expands traditional classroom teaching and multicultural training methods. As mentioned earlier students training to become multiculturally competent may become resistant to the process (Alexander, Kruczke & Ponteillo, 2005). While students may experience resistance in both the classroom and within the cultural immersion setting, time limitations present in the classroom environment often leaves students in an interrupted state of critical consciousness. With little or no time to process what has been discussed, students can experience frustration, avoidance, and disengagement. In an outreach experience however, (such as cultural immersion), students have an extended amount of time to move from resistance to reflection, as they are placed in an environment where their biases are tested and broken down through their extended
contact with community members (West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta, & Templeton, 2012).

Access to a diverse population is another aspect of multicultural competency training that is inherent in cultural immersion but not always available in the traditional classroom setting. Some Counselor Education programs are located in geographic regions of severe limited cultural diversity, thereby limiting student ability to interact with individuals of other populations. Students may have little to no contact with diversity in their everyday lives let alone in their counselor training (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005). Given this, Counselor Education faculty have often found ways to be creative in their attempts to provide students with counseling experiences that involve diverse populations (e.g. using multicultural case studies or having a multicultural panel speak to the class). Despite that some of these methods may be effective in eliciting knowledge about individuals of other cultures and ethnicities, the lack of culturally sensitive counselors practicing today is evidence that such methods have not been enough to elicit in students a genuine openness, acceptance or understanding of diverse individuals. Cultural immersion experiences however have shown to have the capacity of breaking through diversity barrier as direct exposure and contact with another culture is a central component. In fact, Themundo, Page & Bendander (2007) found that the level of cultural sensitivity developed in students who participated in cultural immersion is greater than students who stayed on campus, despite that the campus was culturally diverse. Likewise, Dyjack, Anderson and Madrid (2001) found that while the ongoing close proximity with faculty and classmates in addition to living in impoverished and deprived conditions tests the adaptability and sensitivity of students, yet such difficulties
have the potential to encourage acceptance and break down barriers of prejudice if they are dealt with openly and sensitively.

Another important differential factor in comparing traditional multicultural training versus cultural immersion is the development of affective empathy. Affective empathy, or the type of empathy that describes one’s ability to react emotionally and grow in the areas of attitude, emotion and feelings (Bloom, 1956), affects one’s ability to respond in a similar emotional tone to another’s emotional cues or emotional state. In the field of multicultural counseling, especially where language barriers exist, the capability of a counselor to have affective empathy for another is particularly crucial. For example, if a counselor (residing in a foreign, international country) is responding to a large-scale crisis and doesn’t understand the client’s emotional signals and cues, there is a risk that the counselor could do more harm rather than help the client in crisis. For students participating in cultural immersion programs, affective empathy has been found to be enhanced in comparison to those students who have not participated in such experiences (Burnett, Hamel & Long, 2004). Canfield, Low & Hovestadt (2009) made a similar argument as they found that participation in cultural immersion experiences can have significantly positive impact on the development of empathy for those of cultures and ethnicities different from one’s own.

**Challenges to cultural immersion.** Research has suggested cultural immersion arguably has several unique benefits that traditional multicultural teaching methods simply cannot offer. However, there are certain limitations to the cultural immersion experience. In practicality, cultural immersion experiences involve a significant added expense in time and money over providing an on-campus multicultural counseling
course. Many students, particularly those with family and/or work responsibilities may find participating in a cultural immersion program impractical in light of their circumstances or limited resources.

Cultural immersion is accompanied by further personal challenges to the student (Mather, Karbley & Yamamoto, 2012). Students experience several daily stressors (e.g. disrupted sleep patterns, different food at different times, language barriers, living in less than ideal living conditions) making the cultural immersion experience challenging (Hashim & Zhiliang 2003). Similarly, Butin (2005a) stated that students are “constantly encountering the dilemmas and ambiguities of living with and through the complexity of how life works” (p. 98). While this complexity can be growth producing, some lessons learned can conflict with students’ previous ways of seeing the world or with their sense of self. Such stressors and cognitive dissonance can cause the human body to operate differently, which is an interesting and crucial factor as it may affect the amount of information processed by students and the lessons that educators hope to convey through cultural immersion are interrupted (Butin 2005a, 2005b; Jones, Gilbrid-Brown & Gasiorski 2005).

However, there are more severely perceived limitations to cultural immersion aside from what may be limited feasibility and practicality. Researchers D’Andrea and Daniels (1991) have stated that, through the incorporation and use of cultural immersion as a form of educating students in multicultural counseling, that “one might argue that the counseling profession has perpetuated, and continues to perpetuate (p. 78)”, the social practice of racial discrimination and others have echoed this belief by criticizing the cultural immersion experience. For example, it has been suggested that an experience in a
single country could result in a narrow perspective limited to that country, and that, despite the extended time that students are exposed to the other culture and the added ability to reflect on their experiences, students remain resistant to acknowledging their position of privilege (Butin, 2005a, 2005b; Jones, Gilbrid-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005; Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007).

Although there is literature that discusses the many positive advantages of participating in cultural immersion experience in the development of multicultural competency, the concern still exists for today’s counselors to be able to empathize with and meet the needs of individuals of diverse groups and yet, there remains no-agreed upon consensus for how to best train counselors to become multicultural competent (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1989). This research will explore the process of the development of multicultural competency via participation in a cultural immersion experience.
Chapter 3: Research Approach and Procedures

There are various qualitative approaches that are commonly used within the counseling and similar professions (including grounded theory, ethnography, narrative theory, critical theory, etc.). To understand the process of the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students participating in a cultural immersion experience, the researcher is using the case study approach. The term case study does not have clear unified definition in qualitative research. Patton (2015) defines a case study as the “focus of study” that “stands on its own as a detailed and rich story” about a person, event, activity or process (p. 259). Merriam (1997) describes the case study as a method of inquiry in which the researcher examines in depth an event, activity, process, or individual(s). Patton (2015) explains that the term may be used by researchers to refer to a unit of analysis (e.g., described as an individual or group of people) or to a theoretical construct (e.g., described as an event, activity, or process) (p. 259). Patton (2015) further elaborates that the term case study can be used to refer to both a unit of analysis and a theoretical construct, as it is within this research study; the case or focus of study is both a) a unit of analysis (graduate-level counseling students participating in a cultural immersion program) and b) a theoretical construct (e.g. the process of development of multicultural competency through cultural immersion).

Additionally, Patton (2015) states that in case studies in which the unit of analysis is participants in a program (such as this study), the primary focus of data collection is then “what is happening to the participants in a setting” (p. 260). While data can be collected for case studies can also include documents and observations, the researcher in this study is relying on interview data.
Because the goal of qualitative research is “not just making sense of the world but also making sense of our relationship to the world and therefore discovering things…about some phenomenon of interest (p. 521)”, the researcher must be able to accurately describe, explicate and interpret the participant’s experiences in a subjective manner (Patton, 2015). Therefore, this type of research approach will require the researcher examine the case (i.e., the development of multicultural competency through cultural immersion) from many different perspectives, as each perspective is considered related and inseparable. Also, because qualitative methodology is oriented in understanding the subjective experiences individuals, the researcher will be analyzing on that data of which participants are consciously aware of how they have developed multicultural knowledge, awareness or skills through the cultural immersion experience. Also by using the case study approach the researcher will not only remain consciously aware of her own experience with developing multicultural competency from the same cultural immersion experience to South Africa under study, but will also bracket, or set aside these personal experiences to remain objective and focus on the experiences of the participants. This case study seeks to understand the process of the development multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students participating in an international cultural immersion experience to two separate international regions of Africa: Botswana and South Africa.

In this study, multicultural competency will be defined as having an awareness of students’ own culture as well as the knowledge of others’ cultural values, expectations, and worldviews, in addition to the ability to acquire appropriate interventions and skills and strategies for working with multicultural clients (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992).
Cultural immersion will be defined as a form of experiential education in which students enter into an unfamiliar environment, in a manner in which they are required to function successfully under a unique set of conditions and norms different from their own, for the purpose of expanding their cultural awareness and enhancing their ability to empathize and work effectively with individuals of other cultures (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgado et al 2011; Ishii et al., 2009).

Sampling

As noted by Cherry (2000), quantitative sampling differs from qualitative sampling in the number of people in the sample. Due to the complex nature and due to the sheer volume of data that is to generally collected in qualitative research, sample sizes are generally much smaller to make it manageable. In addition, sampling procedures in qualitative research are selected purposefully as to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth, and for their ability to teach a great deal about the issue(s) of central importance in relevance to the purpose of the research study (Patton, 2015). In order to ensure that the participants chosen for this study are information-rich, the researcher used two strategies of qualitative sampling 1) snowball or networking (Bowen, 2010; Bowen & Moore, 2014), and 2) criterion sampling.

Snowballing (or networking) is used when the researcher creates a chain of interviewees based on people who know people who know people who would be good sources given the focus of inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 270). The purpose of using snowballing in this study was used as it was likely that graduate counseling students of interest to this research all were enrolled within Ohio University’s Counselor Education
program over a short period of five years, making it likely that one potential participant
knew another potential participant and so on.

The second method, criterion sampling is used when the researcher deliberately
seeks out only those participants that can add value to the phenomenon under
investigation. Because this study is attempting to understanding the development of
multicultural competency in graduate level counseling students participating in a cultural
immersion experience, only those individuals that met the following criteria were chosen:

a) Those who were enrolled as either a Master’s-level or Doctoral student in the
   Counselor Education program at Ohio University at the time the cultural
   immersion experience took place; and
b) Participated in the cultural immersion Botswana or South Africa as offered
   through Ohio University’s Office of Global Studies; and

c) Have taken one course in multicultural counseling course at the graduate level

The first and second criterion was developed as the researcher believes that
choosing participants from the same counseling program (in which students engaged in
the same pre-departure orientation prior to leaving and participated in similar activities
and events while abroad) may increase credibility of the study. The third criterion was
defined for this study because, despite the varying level of educational attainment, all
students in the specified counseling program at Ohio University are required to take just
one course in multicultural counseling to earn a master’s degree; additionally, options are
very limited for post-master’s students wishing to take additional multicultural
counseling courses within the Ohio University graduate counseling program; (while
students might have completed an additional multicultural course but this course would
have been offered outside of the Counselor Education program). Thus, this criterion decreases the likelihood that variability exists between participants in the level of multicultural training each has received prior to their engagement in the cultural immersion program.

**Site Selection**

Although the cultural immersion program took place at two separate regions in Africa (i.e., Botswana and South Africa), the purpose, nature and structure of the cultural immersion program remained the same: “to provide participants with first-hand experience of the HIV/AIDS crisis” (Ohio University Office of Global Opportunities, 2013, para. 1). Experiential learning was a central focus as students participated in field placements and a significant portion of the learning occurred through cultural immersion (Ohio University Office of Global Opportunities, 2013, para 1). The study abroad programs were offered to undergraduate and graduate students attending Ohio University (as well as non-Ohio University students) studying within a variety of educational disciplines. A minimum G.P.A. of 3.0 was required and students who were successfully selected for participation had an “expressed interest in HIV/AIDS or experience in researching and/or working in HIV/AIDS-related areas” (Ohio University Office of Global Opportunities, 2013, Eligibility and Selection Process section).

**Program objectives.** The program was designed to provide students with experience of “the HIV/AIDS crisis”, as well “an experience of the prevention and awareness efforts currently underway by various stakeholders” Ohio University Office of Global Studies, 2013, para 1). Through its experiential focus, students were provided with the “unique opportunity to benefit from being embedded with non-governmental
organizations engage in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention initiatives” in which they would “become familiar with the skills necessary for successful HIV/AIDS program planning and implementation and gain practical understanding and experience of the impact of HIV/AIDS and society’s response to the pandemic” (Ohio University, 2013, para 1). Students accepted into cultural immersion program were also expected to fully participate in all program activities and assignments, as well as engaging in group activities and other activities that were planned by program partners in the regions of Botswana and South Africa. Because the experience had a central focus in learning through direct experience and immersion with the international culture, students were also expected to document and show what they had learned through journals and group discussions with peers.

**Curriculum overview.** Before departure, students engaging in the program were required to attend a three-hour weekly orientation session (over a period of 5 weeks) which served as an introduction to the program. Participants learned about their peers and accommodations while abroad, were provided with safety and security precautions, listened to the experiences of guest speakers who were former participants of the program, were provided with an overview of knowledge regarding various aspects of African culture (which included brief lessons on the Afrikaans and Sestwana languages spoken within the regions), and were required to engage in initial course assignments including group activities in which they assessed the HIV/AIDS situation in Africa. Participants also were expected to address their anticipations, expectations, and concerns regarding the program trip to Africa.
Assignments. Program and curriculum objectives were met through a variety of means including

a) Team Assignments. Participants were required to work in teams to submit a research page paper providing an in-depth assessment of the current HIV/AIDS situation in Botswana and South Africa from either a political, economic, educational or health perspective, and then present their findings through an in-class presentation.

b) Initial Impressions Paper. Participants reflected upon what they expected to see, feel, smell, hear and taste during their time in Botswana and South Africa through a brief paper written prior to their arrival.

c) Journal Entries. Participants maintained journals which consisted of regular reactions to readings, lectures, organization visits, excursions, group discussions, experiences and other activities that may have taken place during their stay in Botswana and South Africa with the purpose of eliciting critical thinking of their experiences and synthesizing of required readings. Participants were also encouraged to use creative means to express their experiences. Journals were read at the end of the program by the instructor.

d) Final Organization Analysis Paper. Participants wrote a final paper to assess the strengths and weaknesses of an organization of the students’ choosing. They were required to discuss the organization’s major areas of emphasis, major achievements and key challenges faced by the organization while also providing their own suggestions for strengthening the organizations efforts.
e) Debriefing Sessions. Once a week participants were required to attend a group debriefing session with peers as facilitated by program leader. The debriefing session allowed opportunities for participants to share with the group any experiences that occurred throughout the week and to hear from peers who may have had similar experiences. This allowed for opportunities to process these experiences and receive support, guidance from peers and group facilitator. The debriefing sessions also allowed students to voice concerns (such as those regarding program structure, activities, assignments) and ask questions from the program leader.

f) Final Impressions Paper. At the conclusion of the trip students were required to complete a comparative analysis of the African society and the United States (for example, students may have discussed historical aspects such as the civil rights movement in the U.S. in comparison to the anti-apartheid movement in Botswana or South Africa).

**Sample itinerary.** The total course, excluding the 5-week orientation period, spans a five-week time frame. During the first two weeks of the program students became acquainted with and attended daily lectures at the university affiliate (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and the University of Botswana). University professors and local scholars and historians led and facilitated discussions regarding various aspects of Africa including the culture and people and the political/social/healthcare sectors of Africa (among other topics), with most attention being paid to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. During this time, students also visited both governmental and non-governmental organizations concerning HIV/AIDS before deciding where to volunteer during the last
three weeks of the study abroad experience. Sample volunteer sites included public hospitals, children’s orphanages, college health centers, senior living homes, hospice centers, and/or outpatient treatment centers and facilities for individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Students also participated in a variety of planned excursions including Safari tours, arts and music festivals, and visits to local townships/settlements or other historical points of interest. For example, students of the South Africa program attending the following excursions: 1) a weekend farm stay that gave students the insight into rural life in South Africa, 2) a visit to Kragga Kamma Game Park (a Safari park), 3) a weekend visit to the Grahamstown International Arts Festival (a major event occurring in South Africa that gave students the opportunity to be exposed to the culture(s) of South Africa through the arts and the opportunity to reside on the campus of Rhoads University in Grahamstown), 4) a day trip to the Red Location (one of the oldest settlements near Port Elizabeth), in which students visited a local museum depicting the history of apartheid in South Africa followed by dinner at a local shebeen (i.e., bar) and a traditional drum session by a native of South Africa, and 5) attendance at local sporting events such as Soccer and Lacrosse matches (although not required), and 6) participation in tourist excursions such as whale-watching and surfing lessons. Many students also independently engaging in other activities that had not been pre-arranged by the faculty program leader, such as visiting and attending mass at various local churches, shopping at local malls and town centers, eating out at both informal (“fast-food”) and formal (“dine-in”) restaurants or cooking foods from the local grocery with peers inside their apartment, visiting cafes to enjoy lunch and access to free Wi-Fi, enjoying the nightlife that South Africa had to offer by visiting the movie theatre and meeting native local peers at social
clubs. Participants also took opportunities to explore areas outside their program sites. For example, three students participating in the South Africa study abroad program (none of whom were interviewed in this study however) traveled to Jeffrey’s Bay, approximately 45 miles southwest of Port Elizabeth for an annual professional Surfing competition with new friends of Africa they had met while attending lectures at the local university. Similarly, groups of students from both the Port Elizabeth and Botswana programs extended their stay in Africa and traveled the nearby Cape Town where Nelson Mandela was held in captivity in the prison on Robben Island.

**South Africa.** South Africa is the 26th largest country, accounting for approximately one-eighth the size of the United States that comprises Africa's most Southern tip. Mozambique and Zimbabwe border South Africa on the Northeast, Nimbia on the Northwest, and Botswana borders South Africa directly to the North. Surrounded by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, South Africa maintains a sub-tropic climate with dry, warm weather year around with an average annual rainfall of about 1.5 feet per year, compared to a world average of about 2.8 feet per year (SouthAfrica.info, 2015).

Physical features of South Africa range from bush, grasslands, forests, deserts and majestic mountain peaks, to flat unspoiled beaches and coastal wetlands (SouthAfrica.info, 2015). The 3,000-km coastline is a flat, even, closed one with few bays and inlets, stretching from the Mozambican border in the east to the Namibian border in the west. It eventually gives way to a mountainous, hilly landscape in the central and northern regions (SouthAfrica.info, 2015). South Africa has no significant natural lakes, but several artificial lakes are used mostly for crop irrigation. The country has more than 290 conservation parks and is home to almost 300 mammal species, about
South Africa is home to large numbers of the mammals that have been universally associated with Africa, including the “Big Five”: the elephant, lion, rhino, leopard and buffalo.

South Africa is divided into seven smaller provinces. The Eastern Cape, wherein lies the province’s most prominent city, Port Elizabeth, has been described as having much fertile land with a variety of vegetation and natural floral habitats, of which the People of Africa rely on for agricultural trade and industry of items such as coffee, tea, fruit and cattle and dairy products (SouthAfrica.info, 2015). The Eastern Cape is of significant “natural beauty” containing “particularly rugged cliffs, rough seas and dense green brush” (SouthAfrica.info, 2015). With its “unspoilt sandy beaches, rocky coves, secluded lagoons and towering cliffs”, the coast is the province's main tourist attraction (SouthAfrica.info, 2015).

According to the 2011 Census, approximately 52 million people live in South Africa. Divided across five racial categories in which people could classify themselves in the 2011 census, Black Africans (classified as to Bantu-speaking people of South Africa, including the Zulu, Xhosa, Basotho, Bapedi, Venda, Tswana, Tsonga, Swazi and Ndebele), accounted for approximately 80% of the population. Coloureds (a multiracial ethnic group possessing ancestry from European, African, and Asian ethnic groups) accounted for approximately 9% of the population. Whites (predominantly descendants of Dutch, German, French, English settlers) accounted for approximately 9% of the population. Asians (a multiracial ethnic group descending from India, China, and Vietnam) accounted for approximately 2.5% of the total population, and those who
identified as “Other” or “Unspecified” made up approximately 0.5% of the total population. (StatsSA, 2012).

Despite the enormous ongoing effort to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS (it is recognized as having the largest antiretroviral treatment program in the world), the prevalence rates of HIV remain highest in South Africa (estimated to be at approximately 20% in 2013). Reasons such as prostitution, male homosexuality, intravenous drug use in addition to poverty violence against women contribute to the continued pandemic (AVERT, 2016). While the most affected age group is shown to be women between the ages of 30 to 24, orphaned children are particularly vulnerable to HIV transmission as they are often at risk of being forced into sexual encounters either in exchange for support and resources (food and living arrangements) and because they typically become sexually active earlier than other children (AVERT, 2016; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2015; Population Council, 2007).

**Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.** This program was primarily coordinated by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) located in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. NMMU was founded in 2005 as a result of the union of three different institutions and the South African government’s call to restructure higher education (with the intent of delivering a more efficient and equitable way of meeting the needs of the country in the 21st century) (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2015). According to its website, the vision of NMMU is “to be a dynamic African university, recognized for its leadership in generating cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future.” Likewise, their mission is to “offer a diverse range of quality education opportunities that will make a critical and constructive contribution
to regional, national and global sustainability.” The university prides itself in its ability to offer a wide range of academic, professional, and technological programs at varying levels. The university has approximately 27,000 students based across six campuses in the region (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2015).

NMMU is involved in the community through various means including through its research on HIV/AIDS through its HIV and AIDS Research Unit. Perhaps the most significant purpose of the HIV and AIDS Research Unit is its vision to “to significantly reduce the threat posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a managed comprehensive and well co-ordinated institutional response” and its mission to “strive to promote and sustain a collaborative response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic through governance, teaching and learning, research, community engagement and service provision (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2015). The HIV and AIDS Unit also provides free HIV/AIDS counseling and testing and works within the vision of NMMU to deliver a sustainable future for South Africa by offering several HIV/AIDS specific courses throughout the academic year, in addition to its Higher Education AIV/AIDS Program (HEAIDS) that works to provide effective policy, leadership, advocacy and management, prevention services, effective treatment, care and support, and appropriate teaching of HIV/AIDS across higher education institutions (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2015).

Botswana. Botswana is located in southern central Africa, bordering Namibia directly to the West, Zambia to the North, Zimbabwe to the East and South Africa directly to the South. Geographically, Botswana is predominantly flat and dry with approximately 80% of the region covered by the Kalahari Desert, although the land is
“occasionally interrupted by gently descending valleys, sand dunes, and a large numbers of pans [shallow dwellings] and rolling hills” and is covered in vegetation including thorn, scrub bushes, and grasslands (Darwa, 2011; Our Africa, 2016). One participant in the study abroad program to Botswana states “You step outside and you see mountains and beautiful sky and these incredible flowers…it’s just quiet and amazing (Fran, personal communication, October 23, 2015).” Botswana's climate is semi-arid and although it is hot and dry for much of the year, rainy season occurs over summer months with an annual average range fall from appx 2 feet (in the extreme North-east) to a minimum of less than appx .80 feet (in the extreme South-west area) (Our Africa, 2016).

The total population is estimated to consist of approximately 2 million people in 2010. The major ethnic groups in Botswana include the Tswana (79%), the Kalanga (11%), in addition to the Basarwa, Kgalagadi, and Caucasians (each at 3%). While the primary spoken language is English (due to its history of Colonial rule) and Setswana (which is spoken by around 90% of the population), there are over 20 different spoken languages in Botswana (Siyabona Africa, 2016).

Although prevalence rates have been on the decrease, (declining from 25% in 2005 to 21% in 2013), which can be attributed to the advancement of free antiretroviral treatment, Botswana has the third highest HIV prevalence in the world, after Lesotho and Swaziland (UN AIDS, 2015). Additionally, while the transmission of the HIV virus has also declined across the total population, transmission rates in women continue to increase. Factors such as forced marriage and gender-based violence have increased their vulnerability to HIV. Other factors such as male homosexuality, intravenous drug use
continue to be at blame for transmission of the HIV virus across other subgroups (AVERT, 2016).

**University of Botswana.** Located in Gabrone, the University of Botswana was established in 1982 and is closely involved in the national development of Botswana with the primary purpose of, according to the University of Botswana website, “improving the quality and in expanding the quantity of the human resources needed for development, and to act as the repository of the collective knowledge and experience of the nation and the world” (University of Botswana, About UB, 2016). One way of meeting these objectives is by developing international collaborative research projects and by incorporating international dimensions into regular academic program curriculum (University of Botswana, International Education and Partnerships, 2016). In addition, faculty at the University of Botswana hold doctoral degrees from various international institutions and currently, international student enrollment is also increasing. University of Botswana also offers a variety of study abroad programs accounting for approximately 85 students per semester and about 185 per year, led by faculty from the university (International Education and Partnerships, 2016).

The University of Botswana also has a center for HIV and AIDS research named The Center for the Study of HIV & AIDS (UBCSHA), whose primary purpose is to “support and encourage an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing the challenges HIV and AIDS have presented to the nation” (University of Botswana, Centre for the Study of HIV & AIDS, 2016). The university holds an abundance of outreach services and programs for individuals and families in Botswana including: a) the Adolescent Project (to provide knowledge on HIV and AIDS amongst Botswana
adolescent in churches, schools, and those living with HIV and AIDS), b) the Traditional Healers Project (treating those with documented diseases with medicinal plants), c) the Centre for the Study of HIV and AIDS and the Centre for Culture of Peace Studies (to engage traditional and community leadership in various districts across the country on HIV and AIDS prevention), d) the Families Matter! Program (an evidence-based intervention designed to promote positive parenting practices and effective parent-child communication about sexuality and sexual risk reduction for parents of young children), and e) the Botswana Youth and Family Prevention Project (which conducts focus groups with youth and in-depth interview with key informants to advance HIV and AIDS measures and intervention in secondary schools). In addition, the university holds weekly and monthly seminars and conducts ongoing research related to HIV/AIDS related topics and issues (University of Bostwana, Community Outreach Projects and Programs, 2016).

Ohio University. Ohio University, founded in 1804, is a public university located in Athens County in Southern Ohio (Ohio University, 2016). University enrollment data for the 2014-2015 academic year indicates that less than 3,000 (9%) of the total 30,000 student body population identify as African American (5%), Asian American (1.3%), Hawaii/Pacific Islander (0.1%) Hispanic (92.8%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.1%) and “Other” (4.5%) descent. Within this same year, approximately 1,800 international students (7.8%) were enrolled within the university (Ohio University, 2016). Within the Patton College of Education, of which houses the Counselor Education program, diversity has dramatically doubled since 2011, increasing from approximately 13% in 2011 to approximately 16% in the 2014-2015 academic year. This increase has
been attributed to school faculty and administrators, including the Counselor Education Departmental Chair, to attract and retain a diverse student population (The Athens Messenger, 2016).

The Counselor Education program is CORE and CACREP-accredited and offers a Master’s degree in the areas of clinical mental health counseling, school counseling, and vocational rehabilitation counseling, and a Doctoral degree in Counselor Education (Ohio University, 2015). CACREP (Council for Counseling and other Related Educational Programs) accreditation is an important aspect for any graduate level Counseling program, as it recognizes that the content and quality of the program has been evaluated and meets standards set by the profession. CACREP accreditation requires that the Counselor Education program incorporates multicultural coursework into its academic and program curriculum and provides students with an understanding of:

a) multicultural and pluralistic characteristics within and among diverse groups
b) theories and models of multicultural counseling, cultural identity development, and social justice and advocacy
c) multicultural counseling competencies
d) the impact of heritage, attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual’s views of others
e) the effects of power and privilege for counselors and clients
f) help-seeking behaviors of diverse clients
g) the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients’ and counselors’ worldviews
h) strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination (CACREP Standards, Section 11, 2016).

CORE (Council on Rehabilitation Education) accreditation is equally important as it recognizes the program’s ability to provide the highest quality of faculty and curriculum standards with the specialized area of vocational rehabilitation (CACREP, 2014). A CORE/CACREP affiliation is a new aspect of accreditation that has been added to the Counselor Education program at Ohio University. Therefore, in order to graduate from the program with a Master's degree in any of the three counseling specialty areas, students must successfully complete the course entitled “Multicultural Education”, aimed to provide students with an “understanding of cultural, ethnic, and racial differences and similarities in American society” and “focuses on preparing professionals in educational, community, and leisure settings for working successfully with America's multicultural population” (Ohio University, 2017).

Recruitment of Participants

Because the researcher is also a graduate of the Ohio University Counselor Education program and a former participant of the South Africa cultural immersion experience in 2011, potential participants had already been known to the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher had remained in contact with several individuals from both the counseling program and/or from the cultural immersion experience to South Africa via social media website Facebook. For convenience practicality, the researcher first sent out an open invitation via Facebook to those individuals that has previously been identified as potential participants. Within this invitation, five participants verbally
agreed to participate. The final two participants were recruited using the snowballing method, in which original participants sent other potential participants, of whom they knew met the outlined criteria, an open invitation on behalf of the researcher (to ensure anonymity). A final selection of seven participants was successfully recruited.

Once verbal agreement was obtained, the researcher was provided with each participant’s email address. Participants were then contacted by the researcher via email and provided with a statement of informed consent via surveymonkey.com (see Appendix B). The purpose of the statement of informed consent was to: a) provide a description of the study, b) inform the participant of what they are being asked to do, c) provide the participant with a time frame of how long their commitment will be required, d) divulge any potential risks and/or benefits of participating in the study, e) inform the participant of the ability to withdraw from the study any time, without penalty, and f) alert the participant about how the researcher intends to use the information that is provided to the researcher (Cherry, 2000). Within the consent form participants were also notified of compensation of a $10 US Dollar gift card that they would receive at the culmination of their participation. The statement of informed consent also contained the name and telephone number of the researcher in the event that the participant had any questions or concerns regarding his or her participation in the study. At the end of the electronic consent form, participants were prompted to choose “yes” or “no” to the question “Do you agree to participate in this study?” All seven of those participants initially recruited again agreed to participate. Thus, at this point in time, the researcher and participant worked to develop a time, location and means for conducting the one-hour interview.
Semi-structured Interviewing

While some qualitative research studies rely on field observations, the researcher in this study relied on participant interviews to collect data in this study. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), qualitative interviewing is used when researchers talk to those who have knowledge of a problem of interest, which may include a process, experience or phenomena. It is useful when attempting to explore the experiences of others, to gather insight into the multiple perspectives of others, to help reconstruct events and portray social processes, to explore personal or sensitive issues and complex matters, and when the processes being studied are not visible to the researcher (e.g. such as emotional development) and known only to those who have experienced it (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The researcher conducted one, one-hour interview with each participant. A face-to-face interview was conducted with one participant and via telephone for the remaining six participants. Interviewing by telephone was necessary to reach participants living at a distance from the researcher and to save time and money. While face-to-face interviews are often the preferred method in qualitative research, it has been suggested that there are no major differences between telephone interviewing versus face-to-face interviewing in regards to the amount and type of information obtained, even when investigating sensitive topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). While recognizing that it is more difficult to develop rapport and to recognize both verbal and non-verbal cues of the participant over the telephone, such challenges can be diminished on behalf of the researcher by making preliminary contact with the participant and by sharing information with the participant that indicates some level of familiarity with them and/or their experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).
The challenge of developing rapport via telephone was not a significant limitation in this study as the researcher was already known to participants due to joint enrollment in the Counseling program at Ohio University and mutual participation in the cultural immersion experience under investigation. The researcher reinforced the rapport already developed with participants during preliminary contact which was used as a time to exercise small-talk in addition to explaining the study. However, due to lack of physical presence, the researcher was forced to rely on tone of voice reading the emotional cues of the participants which proved difficult at times. The researcher used verbal communication to express to participants that which would normally be expressed non-verbally. For example, the researcher used verbal expressions such as “m-hmm” rather than head-nodding to express active listening or understanding and by offering participants the opportunity to provide additional information that was not asked during the interview to express support and interest.

After engaging in small-talk the researcher then asked the participants series of demographic questions. With the consent of the participant, a tape-recorder was then used to allow for accuracy in the transcription of data and to ensure that any information provided by participants during the interview was not dismissed.

To investigate topics and collect data, the researcher may use three different interview approaches: the informal conversational interview (or unstructured), the guided interview (or semi-structured), or the standardized open-ended (or structured) interview method (Patton, 2015). Each approach involves a different level of preparation, conceptualization, and instrumentation while also serving a separately intended purpose. Each approach also has its own strengths and limitations. For example, the informal
conversational interview relies totally on spontaneous generation of questions based upon the natural flow of interaction between the researcher and participant during the interview (with the intention of allowing participants to answer from their own frame of reference and provide the researcher with more flexibility to explore unforeseen areas of interest). However, different information is collected from each interviewee, and with a different perspective. Given the natural free-flow of conversation, it may be difficult to gather comprehensive information or data and data organization and analysis can be difficult (Patton, 2015).

In contrast to the informal conversational approach, the standardized interview the researcher relies on a set of pre-arranged and carefully worded questions to be asked of the participants with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence with essentially the same wording. The flexibility of this approach is limited (in contrast to the other interviews approaches where the researcher may use probing questions, for example) however it is useful when it is important to minimize variation and ensure consistency in the questions posed to interviewees. This approach ensures consistency across interviewers and can provide comparability across sites, which can be of crucial importance when the topic of study is controversial or intrusive (Patton, 2015).

The guided interview approach however does involve outlining a set of issues (or subject areas in relation to the central research question) that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins. Such loosely structured interview guides are used to serve as a basic checklist to make sure that all relevant topics are covered, while still allowing the participant to answer questions in an open manner and allowing for some researcher flexibility in exploration of subject areas. However, such flexibility on behalf
of the researcher (such as sequencing and wording in interview questions) could also result in substantially different responses from different perspectives, resulting in lack of ability to compare responses amongst participants. Use of the interview guide, in which each subject area that is significant to research question is covered, also allows for ease in data collection and organization. However, this approach also allows for gaps in which potentially important information, may be omitted (Patton, 2015).

While all three approaches to interviewing share the goal of asking open-ended questions to gather enough information regarding each interviewee’s personal perspective so that the researcher may reach the final step of describing and gathering an understanding of the phenomena or process under study, the semi-structured interview was chosen for the purposes of this study. Using this approach ensured that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each participant and that all major subject areas of interest were covered, while also allowing enough flexibility and freedom to build upon any information in an area throughout the conversation with participants. The interview developed an interview guide that consisted of pre-existing questions relating to the central research questions for each interview. Sample questions that the researcher used to inquire about student development of multicultural competency via cultural immersion include:

a) “What were your expectations of Africa before departure and how did those perceptions change?”

b) “What group or individual experiences were most meaningful to you?”

c) “What general aspects of the study abroad experience did you like the most and why?”
d) “What did you learn about yourself as a result of this study abroad experience?”

e) “How well would you say you know the African culture after this experience?”

f) “How would you describe your interactions with the People of Africa?”

g) “How do you think your experiences influenced your work as a multicultural counselor?”

Throughout the interview process the researcher also took written notes regarding the researcher’s personal reflections, observations, reactions, and thoughts in order to help bracket and set aside personal experiences. The date, time, and location that the interview took place was also documented.

**Data Preparation and Organization**

After the interview with each participant was completed, the researcher personally typed transcripts of the audio-taped interview material and observation notes using Microsoft Word. During transcription, an alias was given to each interview participant. Because a semi-structured interview was being used to collect data relating specifically the development of multicultural competency, interview guides were used to begin the data reduction procedure by developing a basic category for each subject area on the guide.

**Exploration and Analysis of Data**

In the initial step of the data analysis process, the researcher carefully and thoroughly read the data transcribed from each subject area of the transcribed interviews to identify significant words, sentences, or phrases voiced directly by the participants. From these significant words, sentences, and phrases clusters of underlining meaning
(codes) were developed. During this process, the method of constant comparison was used so that instead of developing additional codes for each significant word, sentence or phrase, codes used in the previous transcribed interview could be accommodated for and placed into the codes for the next transcribed interview. At times when interview data could not be accounted for by a previously developed code, new codes were added. After all interview data was analyzed and a list of codes was developed, the researcher was able to look for patterns and themes that all participants share. Codes were rearranged and collapsed to make for more refined descriptions of the phenomena. In this process clusters, themes, and patterns found within the codes were grouped together to identify and provide brief explanations for each basic category initially developed for each subject on the interview guide (which consisted of three subject areas: multicultural knowledge, multicultural awareness and multicultural skills). This step of the data analysis process continued until seemingly no new information could be obtained through further data analysis (also known as data saturation). Finally, using the finalized themes the researcher was able to provide both a textual description (i.e., how students experiencing the phenomena using statements as verbatim) and a structural description of the phenomena (the context that influenced how participants experienced the phenomenon) (Cherry, 2000; Patton, 2015).

**Presentation of Data**

Using the inductive method of qualitative research and data analysis, the researcher lastly completed a final culmination of students’ shared experiences of multicultural competency development through cultural immersion experiences by providing a discussion of the evidence that was found in the themes and categories...
derived from data analysis. The author has provided a discussion that attempts to convince the reader that the themes and categories emerge directly from the data by conveying specific subthemes/subcategories, providing specific quotes from interviewees, and by providing multiple perspectives from individuals in the study to show the diverging views (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Validity in qualitative research is referred to as *trustworthiness*, a term defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to address data quality in qualitative research, and is used as a measure to determine whether the account provided by the researcher and the participants is accurate, can be trusted, and is credible. To establish trustworthiness, the quality of the data is measured by four criteria: 1) credibility, 2) transferability, 3) dependability, and 4) confirmability. In this section, the researcher explains how trustworthiness was obtained via credibility, transferability and dependability.

**Credibility.** According to Guba (1981) the concept of credibility, or the researcher’s ability to take into account all of the complexities that present themselves in a study, and the ability to address any patterns that are not easily explained, can be accomplished via several methods including: a) engaging in prolonged participation at the study site, b) conducting persistent observation, c) peer debriefing (reflect upon the research by sharing growing insights with other professionals or colleagues), d) collecting genuine or “raw” forms of data, e) performing member checks (sharing the overall report with the participants before producing the final form), and f) by ensuring that the final analyses and interpretation of data accurately reflect all sources of data collected (including journals, photos, recordings, notes and other forms). In this study, the researcher attempted to in-
crease credibility by performing member checks with the participants before producing a final report. The researcher provided each participant with the raw transcribed interview, the demographic brief, and an early draft of data analysis and interpretations and asked each participant to carefully review all of the provided documents for accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity.

**Transferability.** Because qualitative researchers believe that what they are studying is context-bound (that there is no absolute “truth” to the phenomena under study), nor are their findings generalizable to larger groups of people, the researcher should strive for transferability in their study. Transferability can be accomplished using thick description, which was attempted in this study by including detailed descriptions of the context and research setting with the purpose of affording other researchers the opportunity to make comparisons with contexts and research settings within which they are working.

**Dependability.** Dependability is the extent to which the process of the inquiry (i.e., interviewing) is dependable. It can be achieved through establishing an audit trail of documents such as original field notes, audio or video recordings, photographs, etc. so that others may examine the researcher’s process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. The researcher has maintained all documents used for this investigation, including the semi-structured interview guide, taped audio recordings, personal reflections recorded during each interview, copies of student consent to participate, documents regarding the cultural immersion programs in Africa and Botswana, and transcribed interviews.
Self as Researcher

According to Patton (2015), the credibility of qualitative inquiry also depends upon the credibility of the researcher as he/she is the “instrument of inquiry (p. 3),” thus implying that the trustworthiness of a study is ultimately determined by aspects such as the background, training, skills, and experience of the researcher. Given the perspective, it is the researcher’s belief that her own background, training, skills and experiences attributes to such credibility.

First, the researcher’s own experience in the cultural immersion program under inquiry may have influenced a preliminary understanding of experiences and stories reported by participants. For example, one participant described the learning about the differences in work ethic between Americans and those in Botswana as exposed to during her daily volunteer work at a counseling center abroad. She described the care-free, relaxed mindset of the workers at the center in Africa. She expressed appreciation and admiration for this way of living, especially when she compared it with her own, American work experiences that involve “multi-tasking” and the “need to be constantly moving” (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).” At that point in the interview, the researcher reflected on her own experiences volunteering at a children’s orphanage in Africa: she recalled feeling very focused, and at peace and not stressed in having to deal with the many tasks or distractions that of which would normally exists during a typical work day in America. The researcher verbally responded to Aubrey’s disclosure (“m-hmm”) to express understanding, to which she replied “You know?!?” (perhaps further affirming that a mutual understanding amongst the researcher and the participant existed) (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015). Because of
this perceived shared understanding, it is the researcher’s belief that the interpretation of Aubrey’s experience (e.g., that she had developed a learned appreciation for the work ethic of those living in Africa, after comparing with that of the U.S.) is likely to be accurate. Another example in which the researcher’s own cultural immersion experience in South Africa may have influenced a preliminary understanding of experiences and stories reported by participants revolves around a brief discussion with the participant Gena. During the interview, Gena had expressed subtle frustration regarding the lack of opportunity that was given while abroad to be directly exposed to the counseling process while volunteering. Having been aware that the researcher also had participated in the cultural immersion experience under inquiry, Gena asked about the researcher’s own experiences while volunteering at a children’s orphanage in South Africa. The researcher reported to Gena having experienced a similar feeling of frustration after having been declined the opportunity to observe a counseling session between a social worker and a young male at her volunteer site as well. Gena seemed validated by disclosure, as indicated in her response in which she theorized that such a lack of opportunity might be attributed to the failure of possessing professional licensure in the foreign country. Interestingly, this common factor between the researcher and participant prompted further discussion of not only the personal experiences of the researcher but also Gena’s personal experience as an independent tourist in South Africa (occurring after the formal cultural immersion program in Botswana had ended). While both exchanges demonstrate the researcher’s understanding of the experiences of the participants, the exchange with Gena demonstrates the researcher’s ability to empathize with participants. Patton cites the researcher’s capacity for empathy, in addition to intercultural competence and cross-
cultural sensitivity, as additional factors that contribute to the credibility of the findings in qualitative research (p. 3).

However, while it is likely that the researcher may have held a preliminary understanding of the experiences of participants that occurred while immersed in the African culture, it is also possible that the researchers’ personal experiences may have hindered the ability to remain objective and set aside any personal biases. During the interviewing process, a participant’s story of a personal experience that occurred during the cultural immersion experience in Africa might have been falsely (presumed) understood and interpreted by the researcher given her own personal and/or similar experiences. For example, Aubrey describes several experiences in which she felt discriminated against while waiting in line at a beauty parlor in Botswana, for what she perceived, was a result of being an American. At the time, the researcher insinuated a commonality existed; however, after the interview occurred and during data analysis (in which the researcher reflected upon her own experiences in Africa and reviewed her personal journal that was written while abroad), there remains a lack of evidence indicating that the researcher shared such an experience with the participant. Therefore, any thoughts, perceptions or emotions regarding the personal experiences of the participants may have been subjected to researcher preconceptions and notions of what the experience was like for that participant, thereby hindering the ability for the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon for that participant.

Secondly, Patton (2015) also attributes credibility of the study to the researchers’ training and education, as such factors may allow the researcher to be more efficient at
identifying and determining which subject areas are critical to address in the data collection process and ultimately lead to a well-developed, comprehensive understanding of the phenomena or focus of study. The training and education of this researcher includes graduate-level coursework at the Master’s level specifically oriented in multicultural counseling in which the Multicultural Counseling Competency model presented in this study, by Sue, Arredondo and McDavis (1992), was a central course component. Furthermore, multicultural counseling and related issues (such as diversity and social justice) have been infused across other Counseling courses at both the Master’s and Doctoral level of which the researcher has satisfactorily completed. Additionally, because the researcher was also an active participant of the specific cultural immersion experience under inquiry, and therefore received the same pre-departure orientation and education regarding Africa (which included a research component), the researcher may be better able to recognize critical subject areas to address in the data collection process and construct a more comprehensive understanding of the process of the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students participating in a cultural immersion experience.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study has been to explore how cultural immersion programs either change or alter the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students. Furthermore, the aim of this study was designed to address the identified research questions with intent to contribute to an existing body of literature regarding the abundant lack of multicultural competency of today’s counselors which continues to be an issue of grave concern to the general counseling profession (Atkinson, Morten & Sue 1989; Sue & Sue, 1990; Heppner & Brian, 1994; Glockshuber, 2005). The notion that the existing body of literature fails to adequately identify how to best train and prepare counselors for working with a diverse cultural population serves as an endorsement for the necessity of completing this current investigation.

As mentioned in previous chapters, this research looks at the failure for counselors to meet the psychological needs of diverse cultural groups in the present and the concern for this trend to continue in future generations of counselors, despite the recognition and ongoing efforts set forth by the profession (including mandating Counselor Education programs to incorporate a course on multicultural competency course in current program curriculum, the development of multicultural competency instruments to assess student levels of multicultural competency, defining and operationalization the term multicultural competency, and the adoption of multicultural counseling competencies into accrediting bodies such as the American Counseling Association.) With this evidence, the counseling literature is anticipated to benefit from a study that looks at other pedagogical methods, such as the inclusion of cultural
immersion experiences, and how such cultural immersion experiences can support or hinder the development of multicultural competency in graduate counseling students.

With cultural immersion suggested as a potentially advanced and adequate method for teaching multicultural competency in a manner that expands traditional classroom methods, curiosity about the lived experiences of individuals engaged in a cultural immersion program inspired inquiry as to how counseling students develop the multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills necessary for working with a diverse population. Thus, this current investigation seeks to: 1) identify the experiences of graduate level counseling students participating in a cultural immersion experience, and 2) to understand how such experiences may change or alter the development of multicultural competency in graduate level counseling students. More importantly, this research serves as a platform to contribute evidence about Counselor Education programs can continue to play a central role in ensuring the counseling profession will increasingly meet the needs of the diverse world by having another tool for preparing students to gather multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills needed to work effectively with a diverse population.

By identifying and understanding the experiences of students engaging in a cultural immersion program, it is in hopes of the researcher Counselor Educators may be better able to advance counseling students’ level of multicultural competency by either: a) incorporating a cultural immersion program into their current program curriculum, or by b) implementing various aspects, deemed most helpful by participants, of the cultural immersion experience into current program curriculum. By providing such new opportunities Counselor Educators may better able to prepare students to think and work
globally in their future careers which could serve as an end to the significant underutilization of mental health services by individuals of minority populations. This chapter provides a demographic description of each of the seven research participants as well as a look into the unique stories each participant has regarding the experience of being fully immersed in a foreign culture as a graduate student and how they reflect upon this experience today. Furthermore, this chapter strategically illustrates the demographic information of the participants and descriptions of how this experience continues to affect them on a daily basis both personally and professionally. At the conclusion of this chapter, readers will be introduced to a matrix of themes that emerged through each of the research interview questions used to elicit information.

Participants

This research study recruited a total of seven participants. Participants were recruited via a variety of means, including a) Snowballing and b) Networking (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Bowen, 2010). The recruitment conditions required that each participant self-identified the following criteria: a) identification as having engaged in a study abroad experience to Botswana (during the years of 2008 or 2009) or to South Africa (during the year 2011) as offered through Ohio University Office of Global Studies, 2) identification as a master’s or doctorate level student currently enrolled in the Counselor Education program at Ohio University or were enrolled in this program at the time the study abroad experience took place, and 3) identification as having taken one course in multicultural counseling at the graduate level before departure. Once eligibility for participation was established, each participant completed the electronic version of the approved IRB (#15X180) consent form developed using SurveyMonkey.com.
Prior to the start of the interview, each participant was instructed to thoroughly read the electronic consent form. Prior to the start of each interview, the researcher verified the interviewee’s agreement to participate, as indicated by their answer of “Yes” or “No” to the question “Do you agree to participate in this study?” at the conclusion of the electronic consent form. At the start of each interview, the researcher asked each research participant if they had any questions regarding the form and/or overall consent process. All participants denied having any further questions and agreed to begin the interview.

The following section introduces each of the seven participants and attempts to portray an image of each individual through the exploration of stories about their experiences as a counseling student participating in a cultural immersion experience. The order of participants was based on the order of who selected the first interview slot.

**Aubrey.** The first participant, Aubrey, is a 33-year-old Caucasian woman living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and working as a full-time professor at a community college counselor for a local women’s health center. Aubrey was recruited through her response to a request for participation posted by the researcher via the Facebook website. Aubrey’s dedication to participating in this study was evident by the fact that she scheduled the interview immediately preceding to engaging in counseling session with her first client for the day. Due to geographical distance, having a face-to-face interview with Aubrey was impractical and the interview with Aubrey took place over the telephone. Upon calling in the early morning hours (as she had requested), Aubrey answered the phone with an enthusiastic “Hi” as if she was excited to talk with the researcher about her
experiences; this excitement continued throughout the interview, as she frequently would answer interview questions before the researcher had finished speaking.

Aubrey continued to demonstrate enthusiasm and maintain a positive attitude, laughing periodically, particularly when reflecting upon some stressful moments with some of her closest friends on the trip. When asked questions about more sensitive topics, Aubrey’s responses included frequent pauses and exasperations, perhaps demonstrating a sense of uncertainty in her tone, as if she was still attempting to thoroughly understand and make meaning of such experiences. For example, when asked what she had noticed about the factors of prestige, power, and discrimination during her stay in Botswana, Aubrey stated:

It was strange...[long pause]...I don’t know. It was like...I was like sometimes I felt uh, like (exasperates) picked out because we didn’t belong there... but in other ways um..I also felt like I couldn’t be mad when that happened...I felt badly, but I felt like...I don’t know. I felt like..I think I felt a lot of guilt for that (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

Aubrey also demonstrated some difficulty in recalling specific moments and experiences when prompted, as indicated by statements such as “I don’t think I remember thinking, like knowing what the food would be like (Aubrey. Personal communication. September 25, 2015).” On a more consistent manner throughout the interview, Aubrey spoke in a soft, gentle tone demonstrating sincerity and thoughtfulness. For example, when asked about what she had learned of the culture of Africa, described the learning about the differences in work ethic between Americans and those in Botswana as exposed to during her daily volunteer work at a counseling center abroad. She described the care-free,
relaxed mindset of the workers at the center in Africa and how this was much different than that of the American work ethic, which surrounds being “constantly moving” and multi-tasking rather than staying mindful and enjoying the present moment. At the conclusion of the interview with Aubrey, she again enthusiastically agreed to participate in the follow up interview stating “Okay, just let me know when and no problem!”

**Ben.** Ben, a Caucasian male at 39 years of age, is the second research participant. Ben currently works as a full-time professor of Counselor Education in the Midwest, where he resides with his wife and four children. Ben made it a point to mention that his family enjoys living in a rural geographical area, despite that this prevents having access to high-speed internet. Due to this technical incapability and to geographical distance, the interview with Ben occurred over the telephone. Ben made it clear that there would be a chance of losing cell phone signal, at which point he asked that the researcher call him back. Fortunately, the interview remained uninterrupted.

Ben was the only selected participant that had successfully completed one full year of the doctoral program in Counselor Education prior to engaging in the cultural immersion experience. He also was the only male participant of the cultural immersion experience to South Africa in 2011. In being the only male on a trip with 10 other female peers, Ben recalls feeling lonely:

The worst part of the arrangement was that I was the only man…And I think my sense maybe is a little different because I was a loner. You know, I watched so much TV at night when I could and now, if I had a male roommate, I would have been doing more things (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).
Ben also indicated feeling as though he had taken on the role of guardian and protector, as he explained several times that he had been asked by his female peers to accompany him on leisurely excursions. Ben was not just the only male of his study abroad group, but he was also the only participant that was married and of whom had children when the cultural immersion experience occurred.

Ben presents as an individual who is determined to complete the things that he is passionate about, such as continuing to learn and to be enlightened by other cultures. When asked about his volunteer work at a children’s orphanage, Ben states:

What I learned from working with [the director of the organization] is, I know what I would do with a million dollars fell in my lap because…I have seen people carve out an oasis of hope in the middle of a horrible place…and they changed lives (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

Ben was referring to an experience that occurred while volunteering at Maranatha Care Children in which the director of the organization created a living space for a homeless adult male who had recently been caught trespassing onto their property. [Maranatha Care Children is a non-profit charity, established in 2009, aiming to help children in South Africa who are orphans, homeless and/or living on the street, or otherwise identified as at-risk, by offering development in education, training and the skills needed to live a healthy, independent life (Global Giving Foundation, 2017).] Ben describes the experience as “impressive” and one that emphasizes a self-sustaining community; a perspective from which Americans can learn from.

Ben’s passion and desire to learn about other cultures continued even after the interview had concluded, by discussing his current attempts to establish a study abroad
program in Saint Lucia in the Caribbean with the university for whom he is currently
employed.

**Stacey.** The third participant, is a 36-year-old Caucasian female specializing in
marriage and family therapy and current professor of Counselor Education. Upon
learning that the researcher was recruiting participants for this study through personal
contact with the researcher via social media, Stacey immediately assisted the researcher
by reaching out to friends and acquaintances of hers that are also students of Ohio
University’s Counselor Education program, notifying them of this study. It was at this
time that Stacey also agreed to participate in the study.

At the beginning of the telephone interview, Stacey begins to speak of her
experiences with leisurely travel in the past. She emphasized the fact that she had longed
for an opportunity to participate in a study abroad program during undergraduate studies,
however was unable to do so because of her commitment in athletics. While Stacey
spoke clearly and maintained a positive attitude throughout the interview, she seemed to
speak faster when discussing sports and the value that the African culture places upon the
sport of Soccer:

That was one sport that I never played…I never liked soccer. And when I went
over there…when I was working with the kids, that’s how a lot of times I would
communicate with the kids…they would teach me how to play (Stacey, personal
communication, September 29, 2015).

Stacey’s tone of voice also became louder when discussing those experiences that were
particularly impactful for her, such as during her volunteer work at the Botswana-Baylor
Children’s Clinical Center of Excellence; [The Botswana-Baylor Children’s Clinical
Center of Excellence is an organization staffed by both U.S. and Botswana healthcare professionals that are responsible for providing medical and psychosocial treatment for HIV-AIDS-infected children and families from around Botswana, primarily of whom are adolescents, in both the residential and community settings (Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative, 2017). Statements such as this demonstrate Stacye’s level of passion:

The kids were outside and I was doing a little group with them and…they’re wearing their little Christmas sweaters [laughing] and their little turtlenecks [sic] and the kids [at her volunteer site] has pretty bad hygiene, they just did…and I remember the ones wanted me to get a book and there was like four kids all around me at this time and they each had ‘dragon breath’…I was never so happy (Stacey, personal communication, September 29, 2015).

Stacey continued to demonstrative enthusiasm throughout the interview as indicated by her immediate response of “Yea!” at several intervals in which the researcher would ask clarifying questions. She also appeared to be seeking validation of understanding from the researcher, as she often would interject with “You know?” in her responses to the researcher’s questions. The fact that Stacey is aware that the researcher also participated in the study abroad experience to Africa may further validate this theory.

Stacey was reflective about the questions asked of her throughout the interview and made several references to what she had learned about herself from this experience, including the difficulty she endured while returning and attempting to readjust to her life in the U.S. as she stated “I had a really hard time just being back…everybody forgot about you (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).
While other participants mentioned similar experiences that they had regarding their return to the U.S., Stacey was the only participant that discussed that labeled her experience as “Re-entry” and discussed how her struggle with re-entry influenced her to conduct professional research on the subject. Stacey concluded the interview by again discussing the personal impact that the cultural immersion experience in Africa had upon her personally, as her last statement referred to “what’s really important” in life and her ongoing attempt to “make meaning of” it (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

Diane. The fourth participant, Diane is a 32-year-old Native American female. Although she had traveled abroad before (to the United Kingdom and to Mexico), she had no prior formal study abroad experience before traveling to South Africa in 2011. She is single and does not have any children. She currently lives in West Virginia and works as a clinical mental health counselor at residential facility for children and adolescents with psychiatric issues, an employer of whom she has worked for since 2007. Diane chose to schedule the interview during her work hours, causing the interview to be delayed. Diane spoke quickly and hurriedly, a possible indication that she was feeling stressed. Her tone quickly changed however when the first question was asked, inquiring about the reason as to why she decided to participate in the study abroad program to South Africa. She began to laugh, stating that her reason is “very corny” as she recalled being a young child:

My mom, when I was younger, always used to have all these issues because I didn’t eat very well and I was very picky about my food and she would always be like, ‘there’s starving kids in Africa’…I didn’t understand that…where Africa
was and that there are legitimately starving kids there. So as a young kid I always
wanted to go to Africa (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015).
The tone of her voice lowered as she continued on to say “Um, and also, um...my mother
died of AIDS, so (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015)” before rather
quickly changing the subject and without pause and preventing the researcher to give a
response. Diane’s disclosure, stated in a manner that included brief pauses and
interruptions unlike her previously natural flow of speech, indicated a strong desire and
passion to learn about HIV and AIDS that was unconventional and impartial to that of the
other six participants.

Diane is the youngest of the seven participants and was 28-years-old at the time
the cultural immersion experience occurred. She emphasized how much she enjoyed the
ability to act independently while abroad, including the evenings in which she was free to
do as she desired. Diane’s extraverted nature was apparent in her speech as she began the
interview with chit-chat, asking various questions, and continued to talk excitedly as she
discussed her interactions with other young natives of South Africa:

I got to spend a lot of time with locals in my evenings...My absolute favorite part
um, were two particular evenings. One I spent with someone I worked with in my
volunteer hours and she invited me into her home and I got to know her family
and it was absolutely amazing...Um, and the other evening I spent with two guys
that I met at a club and just kicked it on the beach for like hours and it was great.
And to me, that was the most valuable (Diane, personal communication,
September 29, 2015).
Diane was one of the few participants of the study who spent additional time outside of normal working hours with individuals from her assigned site at the Cheshire Home; [The Cheshire Homes is a public, structured residential community that provides service to persons with disabilities across South Africa with a wide range of services and resources including early childhood development, livelihood development, and independent living opportunities. While several homes exist, The Summerstrand Cheshire Home in Port Elizabeth where Diane volunteered caters specifically to chronically physically disabled adults who come to live their lives there, either by choice, or because of circumstances beyond their control (Cheshire Home South Africa, 2017)].

In nearly each separate response to the interview questions, Diane made reference to the social environment and society (whether it be U.S., African or Native American society), at various systematic levels including economically, culturally and professionally. The long-lasting impact that such meaningful social experiences had upon her is evident by the fact that she surrounds her daily environment with visual momentums of the experience:

In my office, I have Baler twine they you like to wrap up bale so hay with...this little thin rope. And then I have clothes pins and then I have pictures of South Africa. So, there are fifteen pictures of South Africa in from of me right now…I keep it in my office as inspiration to remember that, it’s not that difficult (Diane, September 29, 2015).

Diane was one of two participants of the seven to ask the researcher questions at the conclusion of the interview including additional inquiry regarding the research study. In
doing so, she expressed genuine interest and desire to hear about the experiences of other Ohio University Counseling students’ in Botswana and South Africa.

**Elaine.** The fifth participant is 31-year-old Caucasian female, Elaine. Although her educational background includes training in clinical mental health, Elaine has chosen a career path as a vocational rehabilitation counselor working for a government organization aimed at assisting individuals with disabilities in obtaining employment and the ability to live independently. She spoke of her job as “always changing”, requiring much travel across the state of Ohio, before proceeding on to say that she is currently in the search of a new job and “looking for other things” (Elaine, personal communication, 2015).

Elaine is also married and just recently became a mother for the first time. Due to her busy schedule (and for practicality reasons) the interview occurred via telephone. Elaine’s exhibited exhaustion in her voice, as her responses often began in a loud, clear tone before she trailed off muttering in a soft, low manner. She also expressed concern over her ability to recall and provide valuable information as it has been four years since she traveled to South Africa. However, as the interview continued she became more engaged, laughing and talking in a very natural, informal and conversational manner.

Elaine is one of three participants that had engaged in a previous study abroad experience before the cultural immersion experience to South Africa in 2011. She described her experience to El Salvador as a “school to school exchange program” that she completed while in elementary school, making her experience particularly unique from all other participants as their previous study abroad experiences occurred at the university level.
Elaine considers the cultural immersion experience to South Africa as a “bon voyage” trip as she had just graduated from the Master’s program from Ohio University. She continued to explain that she was “always very interested in Africa”, referring to the continent of Africa and not specifically to the country/region of South Africa. She explained that her interest in the cultural immersion program to South Africa was triggered by a friend of hers of whom had previously traveled to Botswana and spoke highly of the experience. She adds that learning about African culture, specifically music and dance, was of particular interest to her as she described herself as “[coming] from a very musical background” which influenced her to study African dance while attending college. Elaine adds “and also the animals…” as a reason for her desire to participate in the study abroad program. Her enthusiasm regarding the safari expeditions was evident, as she referred to them again at the conclusion of the interview when asked what she enjoyed most about the study abroad program. She also mentioned enjoying leisurely trips to the Boardwalk (with shops and restaurants) and “hanging out” with a local musician and his friends (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015). While all participants discussed in great length their experiences in working with the HIV/AIDS specific population, including their personal perspectives, thoughts and opinions, Elaine talked about her experience in a much different lens:

I did realize um, like how inaccessible things were there and that a lot of them had to be in the Rehab[ilitation] facilities because of that. Their sidewalks weren’t even accessible or anything, so…you know, it was kind of a huge eye opener for me you know, being a disability Counselor…I think you have to look at HIV/AIDS as a disability too…that’s definitely a huge, huge thing that I think is
kind of overlooked sometimes [in the U.S.] …because we don’t really experience that much here (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).

Elaine was also the only participant of the study abroad program that had elected to volunteer her time at two volunteer sites: Cheshire Home and Aids Haven; [Aids Haven, now known as The House of Resurrection Children’s Home, strives to attend to the developmental, health, and spiritual needs of children who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and/or abandonment, primarily through the organization of foster home placement (The house of Resurrection Home, 2017)]. Elain explains: “It was kind of nice that I got to experience two different sites, but that might be different for someone that got to stay at the same site for the whole time (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).” It may be insinuated from her statement that Elaine acknowledges her experiences as different from other participants’ (of whom remained at one volunteer site throughout the duration of the program) and that as a result, her ability to build personal relationships or become as immersed with the individuals at each site may be have been limited in comparison to other participants’.

Fran. The sixth participant is Fran, a Caucasian doctoral student studying Counselor Education at Ohio University at the time the face-to-face interview occurred, which took place at the campus library in a quiet study room that had been reserved by the researcher. Specializing in clinical mental health counseling, Fran’s professional work experiences have consisted primarily of providing counseling services in the outpatient setting. Over the past year however Fran has been working towards completing her doctoral internship in the general hospital setting.
At the age of 42, Fran is the oldest of the seven participants that engaged in the cultural immersion experience by traveling to Botswana in 2008. During the interview, Fran discusses how she believes her age affected her experience and her ability to connect and process her experience with her younger peers:

I think being a non-traditional aged student definitely affected [the experience]…because I, it’s a lot of people were like ‘let’s go out, let’s party…let’s drink [all] we can’. And that, that really…I’m not a huge fan of that…but I did have um people that, that I connected with on the trip…kind of looking out for them like [in a] big sister kind of way…being able to make jokes and laugh about some of the silly things and the common experiences and to have somebody who like, you know walk with and talk about what [you’ve] seen that day. Yeah, there was definitely some of that, I just don’t think it was at the ‘summer camp’ intensity level that I think some of the others’ experienced (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Fran adds that there were other personal factors that likely affected the way she interacted with her peers; she was not only attempting to readjust to being a student in the college environment after working for four years, but she was engaged to get married to her current husband at the time of travel. She reminisces not about the difficulty of being away from her husband for five weeks but rather on a potential benefit to this by stating

One of my better memories is a stack of emails that my husband and I wrote back and forth while I was there and they’re sweet and hilarious and silly…and there are things that I forgot about that I wrote to him so it was nice to have that way of remembering (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).
Fran and her husband are both long-term residents and active members of their local community. Fran’s passion and devotion to “give back” to local communities is evident throughout the interview, as Fran makes several references to the concept of community centeredness and unity:

There are still, unlike here [in the U.S.], there are still community centers of action and focus…it was really a lot of kinds of elders in the community coming together to take care of all the children and it didn’t matter whose child you were (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

She adds that one of the primary reasons for participating in the program was her desire to be an active participant of an African community and not “behind the walls…at a different university (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).” Her passion and devotion to small communities was extended upon her return to the U.S. Fran was able to assist the Botswana community by speaking with local businesses and churches in her hometown, encouraging them to provide financial assistance to organizations within Botswana, which she believes was successful.

Fran also has a rich history in faith and religion and currently works as a Reverend. She incorporated her value of faith and religion into the cultural immersion experience by volunteering at the United Council of Churches, a fellowship of churches located across several countries including Botswana. The United Council of Churches is an English-speaking Christian organization in Botswana founded in 1966 and constitutes most of the churches in Botswana. It is a non-profit membership organization that provides programs to disadvantaged groups both nationally and internationally, including political education, youth work, child care, refugee work and women’s issues (Global
Ministries, 2017). She explains that this was a “great opportunity” and an honor that she did not expect to receive as “being a short, middle-aged white woman not something or someone that they would imagine as a pastor (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015). While Fran expresses gratefulness for the ability to volunteer, and preach at the United Council of Churches, during the interview she incorporates into her responses various experiences she had while visiting hospice centers. Her background studies regarding women in politics (including a previous study abroad trip to Ireland centered on the subject), may have also contributed to this perspective. For example, when asked about her experiences with power, prestige and discrimination in Botswana, Fran responds:

Women [in Africa] are not treated in the way that we take for granted (as Americans] …Or even the way they could be...it's very different. The power structures are very different. Um, and there are certain, certainly some areas where women like okay, they, they're in charge of this section or this part of society (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

It was evident that Fran was passionate about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as she spoke vividly (using her hands as gestures) about her experience. Throughout the interview, she continued to discuss the cultural immersion experience in working with individuals with HIV/AIDS at great length and detail, predominantly through the lenses of community centeredness, humanity, and religion.

**Gena.** Gena, the seventh and final research participant, was recruited through social media. She is a 29-year-old Caucasian female living in central Ohio her two-year old daughter and her husband. She keeps a seemingly busy lifestyle and struggled to find an
adequate time in her schedule to conduct the telephone interview. Despite that the interview occurred on a late Wednesday evening, Gena’s concern for being interrupted by family matters (in addition to wanting to ensure that the audio quality was sufficient) influenced her to move to the basement of her home to participate in the interview.

While Gena studied both school and clinical mental health counseling as a Master’s student, she explains the difficulty she experienced in deciding upon which area she wanted to start her career in, adding that she ultimately decided to stay in the clinical field due to a job opportunity that arose from her internship experiences. Currently, Gena is working as a Senior Clinical Trainer for a health insurance company where she trains new employees of the Behavioral Health department.

Gena expressed enthusiasm to discuss her experience as a first-year Master’s student traveling to Botswana in 2009 from the time that she was approached to participate and throughout the conclusion of the interview. This was her first and only formal cultural immersion experience, although she explains that she had “always wanted to study abroad” and thus “when researching graduate programs” she “actually looked into whether they offered some kind of like study abroad component (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).” She sustained enthusiasm over not only having had the opportunity to travel to Botswana but also to share her experience with other, speaking in a high tone of voice filled with passion and energy throughout the interview.

Before the interview began, Gena was first asked a series of demographic questions. When asked what year she studied abroad, Gena responded “So that was in…[pause]..I should have like thought about having some of this stuff readily accessible…um….” and began to laugh sheepishly, as if she were embarrassed for having
to give the question much thought and consideration. Gena’s frequent interjections of “um” or “uh” in her responses to the interview questions may be considered additional possible indicators that Gena struggled in recalling specific experiences. For example, when asked about what she had learned in regards to cultural differences between Botswana and the U.S., Gena replied:

   Um, cultural like differences, uh, um one of the them was just like always uh um...I, I forget the exact like conversation, the exact story, but people just really wanting to like share their food with each other, that kind of thing like expected to like share your food with like the people like around you. Um, that was one. I'm trying to think of some other specific things (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

While she did seem to have difficulty in recalling some specific stories and/or events that occurred while abroad, Gena was able to share some of her earliest perceptions and expectations regarding the African culture. Gena was also able to elaborate upon how the experience continues to affect her interactions with individuals of other races and ethnicities to this day, including intimate conversations with her biracial husband:

My um husband is uh, biracial and he like…like used to (and still) like laughingly make comments when we're out somewhere and he'll say like, ‘I was, I'm the only like black person’ or like ‘I'm the only like black person in the group.’ And like not that I like laughed at him before but I just always kind of took it as like for a joke or like it's not being like a big deal. And um, and he always said it in like a joking way so it's not like I was, um, uh, you know like misinterpreting like the way he was making the comment, but um, I think like it did make me a little more
aware that like maybe I was a little extra conscious of how I uh, represent myself because I didn't want to be um, like a bad example of like someone that um, either from my race or like from the United States, or whatever they were looking at me as…(Gena, personal communication, 2015).

Gena continued on to explain that, because of her long-term relationship with a biracial man, her ability to interact comfortably with individuals of other races and ethnicities was heightened even before engaging in the cultural immersion experience to Botswana. Although, she does endorse that a direct result of being immersed in the Botswana culture is the ability to now demonstrate increased empathy and understanding when interacting with individuals of other races and ethnicities.

As the interview concluded, Gena disclosed frustration in not having the ability to facilitate or shadow counseling sessions while in Botswana while volunteering at the SOS Children’s Village. [The SOS Children’s Village is part of a larger organization, SOS Botswana, that serves youth and their families of whom are affected by HIV/AIDS. While the organization provides several programs including foster care and education to children of all ages, as well as providing care and resources for children exposed to child labor, SOS Children’s Village is an orphanage that houses 40 children from the surrounding community, many of whom come from child-headed households in the poorer areas of Gaborone (the Capital of Botswana)]. Gena asked about the researcher’s own experiences while volunteering at a children’s orphanage in South Africa and a brief discussion ensued. The researcher recalled experiencing a similar feeling of frustration after having been declined the opportunity to observe a counseling session between a social worker and a young male at the volunteer site. Gena seemed validated, adding that
perhaps the reason that both she and the researcher had lacked this opportunity might be attributed to failure to possess counseling licensure in the foreign country. Interestingly, this common factor between the researcher and participant prompted further discussion of not only the personal experiences of the researcher but also Gena’s experience as an independent tourist in South Africa (occurring after the formal cultural immersion program in Botswana had ended).

**Demographic Profile**

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aubrey</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>First Year Doctoral Student</td>
<td>CMH</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Graduated Doctoral Student</td>
<td>CMH</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>First Year Doctoral Student</td>
<td>CMH</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Second-Year Masters Student</td>
<td>CMH/Rehab</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Graduated Master’s Student</td>
<td>CMH/Rehab</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Second-Year Masters Student</td>
<td>CMH</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>First-Year Masters Student</td>
<td>CMH/School</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic information obtained from each of the seven participants including gender, age, rank in graduate school (at the time the cultural immersion experience occurred), content area of specialization within the program (i.e., clinical mental health [CMH]), school counseling, and/or vocational rehabilitation counseling [Rehab]), and the study abroad program destination year. Additional demographic information not displayed in Table 1 includes previous formal study abroad experience.
The participants each self-identified in accordance with the outlined criteria, thus all seven were graduate-level counseling students studying at Ohio University at the time the cultural immersion experience occurred and traveled to either Botswana in 2008 or 2009 or to South Africa in 2011. This information has been identified as necessary to this study because the analysis of meaning for each of the participants as it relates to multicultural competency development through cultural immersion considers how such differences contributes to a unique lived experience.

**Demographic Trends**

Of the seven participants selected, three participated in the South Africa cultural immersion program in the year 2011 and four participated in the Botswana cultural immersion program (one participant in 2008 and three participants in 2009). Four of the seven participants were Master’s level students specializing in clinical mental health counseling, with two participants also specializing in vocational rehabilitation counseling and one participant also specializing in school counseling. Of the four Master’s level participants, one was a first-year student and two were second year students at the time the cultural immersion experience occurred; one of the four Master’s level participants completed their degree immediately prior to the cultural immersion experience. Of the seven participants selected, three were studying at the doctoral level at the time they engaged in the cultural immersion experience.

Of the seven participants, six identified themselves as White/Caucasian and one identified as Native American. Gender distribution among study participants revealed a higher number of women (apx 85% percent) compared to men (15%). This was an expected trend as more women (approximately 70%) compared to men (approximately
30%) comprise the counseling profession (United States Department of Labor, 2016). Overall, two of the study participants (appx 28% percent) reported that they had at least one prior formal study abroad experience in a formal academic setting to locations that include El Salvador and Ireland.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide demographic information about each participant and trends found within the participant group. In the following chapter a list of each of the thirteen semi-structured interview questions and participant responses to these questions will be explored. Further analysis will be conducted to find major themes and categories that emerged from participant responses and how these themes and categories relate to the original research questions of: 1) what are the experiences of graduate-level counseling students participating in a cultural immersion experience, and 2) how do these experiences change or alter the development of multicultural competency. Followed by the next chapter will be a discussion.
Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter explores and interprets the responses of recorded interviews with each of the seven participants and describes the emergent themes found within this data as it relates to counseling student development of multicultural competency through having participated in a cultural immersion experience. Interview data was analyzed to elucidate common themes found from seven former Counselor Education students of whom traveled to Africa to study HIV/AIDS during their graduate studies to determine if their development of multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills is unique. This process of data analysis was conducted using the following six proposed steps by Marshall and Rossman (2011): 1) organizing the data, 2) generating categories and themes, 3) coding the data, 4) testing emergent understanding of the data, 5) searching for alternate explanations of the data, and 6) writing the data analysis. The use of the multicultural competency model by Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1992) is used to help analyze data obtained from the interviews.

The data were analyzed in the context of relevant published literature and using the foundational model by Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1991) describing student development of multicultural competency which consists of three aspects: 1) multicultural knowledge, 2) multicultural awareness, and 3) multicultural skills. The first aspect, identified as multicultural knowledge, includes themes that emerged from participant interviews that related to increased knowledge regarding one’s own culture, beliefs, values, biases and/or attitudes. The second aspect, multicultural awareness, consists of themes that emerged when participants explained having an increased awareness of others’ cultural values, customs, expectations, and worldviews. The third
aspect, multicultural skills includes themes that emerged from participant responses that made reference to acquiring appropriate intervention skills and strategies for working with multicultural clients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multicultural Knowledge</th>
<th>Multicultural Awareness</th>
<th>Multicultural Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of Personal Biases, Preconceptions and False Ideas</td>
<td>• Knowledge of HIV/AIDS in Africa</td>
<td>• Open-mindedness, Understanding, Compassion and Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of Self</td>
<td>• Knowledge of Culture of Africa</td>
<td>• Increased Comfort in Interacting with Individuals of Other Races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of Economic Privilege</td>
<td>• Knowledge of People of Africa</td>
<td>• Acknowledgement of Need for Continuing Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changed View of (own) American Culture</td>
<td>• Knowledge of Poverty in Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge of Mental Health Counseling in Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* Multicultural Competency and Corresponding Themes. This figure illustrates the three aspects of the Multicultural Competency (knowledge, awareness and skills) and the corresponding themes found during analysis of interview data.

**Summary of Emerging Themes**

Table 2 (below) illustrates a summary of the emerging major themes, a relevant quote from participant accounts, and a brief description of the nature of each theme.
### Summary of Emerging Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Relevant Quotations</th>
<th>Nature of the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Personal Biases, Presumptions and False Ideas</td>
<td>“I had assumptions that I had to challenge myself because it’s completely different…everybody’s story is different”</td>
<td>Participants explained personal biases, presumptions and false ideas regarding Africa and how these changed from the cultural immersion experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Self</td>
<td>“I think something that I learned… that my best work is done when I can look another individual in the eye and have an in-depth conversation and be able to find some common ground”</td>
<td>Participants explained various aspects of personal growth and self-awareness they gained as a result of cultural immersion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Economic Privilege</td>
<td>“I had economic privilege of being able to go over there, to experience it, and then I had the privilege to not be in it anymore. To go back to my comfort zone. But, some people don’t have that”</td>
<td>Six of the seven participants voiced having a heightened sense of their own economic privilege in comparison to those living in Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed View of American Culture</td>
<td>“I felt like I had a hard time with connecting with people about what was really important in the world and I remember when I came back”</td>
<td>Participants discussed their changed views of America as a result of their cultural immersion experience to Africa (e.g. perceptions of Americans as egocentric).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of HIV/AIDS in Africa</td>
<td>“I thought if anywhere [Africa] would be the place where they had all the information [about HIV/AIDS] because it’s such a big issue there. But, that was not the case…there was a huge lack of education about it”</td>
<td>Participants indicated learning about various aspects surrounding HIV/AIDS (e.g. myths, stigma, prevalence) in Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge People of Africa</td>
<td>“I formed a relationship with a girl named Tato…a student at the University of Botswana…and forming that relationship really meant a lot; she taught me a lot about like the cultural differences and that was really interesting”</td>
<td>Participants discussed learning about the people of Africa through developing relationships and/or having meaningful interactions with them, both within and outside of their structured volunteer experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Poverty in Africa</td>
<td>“I knew to expect poverty but until I really saw it, I didn’t really understand to the extent that it was”</td>
<td>Participant reported being exposed to the poverty in Africa through various aspects of the cultural immersion experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Mental Health Counseling in Africa</th>
<th>“I was able to see how [the People of Africa] accepted and saw treatment for mental health issues”</th>
<th>Many participants increased knowledge and awareness regarding the nature and structure of mental health services and treatment in Africa.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-Mindedness, Understanding, Compassion and Empathy</td>
<td>“It kind of makes you more open, more understanding…When you are educated about [unique cultural aspects] you can understand and help people better”</td>
<td>All participants expressed belief that the experience had made them more culturally sensitive (e.g. developed a broadened worldview and had an increased understanding and empathy for individuals of other cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Comfort in Interacting with Individuals of Other Races and Ethnicities</td>
<td>“I feel more comfortable talking about issues of diversity…about race, about gender, about disability, about religion”</td>
<td>Some participants indicated feeling more comfortable and confident in talking and interacting with individuals of other races and ethnicities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement for Need of Continuing Education</td>
<td>“I am aware that I need to be more knowledgeable…that applies from being a clinician or a Counselor Educator…when I have student that is from a different culture, I’m willing to be a student”</td>
<td>Participants acknowledged the complexity of achieving multicultural competency and recognized the need for continued education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Aspect One: Multicultural Knowledge**

The first aspect identified in the exploration of the lived experiences of counseling students’ development of multicultural competency through a cultural immersion experience to Africa is the achievement of multicultural knowledge, defined as knowledge regarding their own culture, beliefs, values, biases and/or attitudes (Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1992). Four themes emerged regarding the development of multicultural knowledge and these include: 1) Knowledge of Personal Biases, Presumptions and False Ideas, 2) Knowledge of Self, 3) Knowledge of Economic Privilege, and 4) Changed View of American Culture. The following section will provide a detailed exploration of how
their lived experiences illuminated these themes.

Knowledge of personal biases, presumptions and false ideas. Researchers assert that students have pre-existing stereotypes and false ideas, in addition to personal biases, beliefs and prejudices regarding other cultures which often develop through their social upbringing or background, or through media (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Hood & Arceneaux, 1987; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Unfortunately, literature also asserts that such pre-existing biases, presumptions and false ideas (including factors of prejudice and discrimination) are often not addressed until students are asked to directly engage in activities that are designed to confront, address or reflect upon them (Roysircar, 2004). This is critical to Counselor Education because such pre-existing biases, beliefs and prejudices can interfere with student development in multicultural competency training (Ponterotto, Alexander & Greiger, 1995).

This theme suggests that any pre-existing personal biases, presumptions and false ideas that counseling students may have regarding other cultures can be transformed as a result of participating in a cultural immersion experience, supporting existing research that cultural immersion programs can address issues of cultural identity, prejudice, bias, and discrimination (Kottler, 1997). During the interviews participants were asked “What were your expectations of Africa (what did you expect to see, hear, taste, smell, etc.) before departure and how did those perceptions change as a result of your study abroad experience?” Many participants disclosed having personal biases, presumptions and false ideas regarding Africa (and the African culture) before departure and demonstrated how prolonged exposure (including volunteering and studying) in the foreign culture refuted such biases, presumptions and false ideas. For example, nearly half of the participants
made references to their presumptions for the African landscape to be flat and for the African climate to be warm, possibly as a result of perceptions they had developed as a result of early childhood learning through media such as television. For example, Aubrey explained that:

I had such a generalization that I was going to be in Africa and that it would be hot…that was an expectation that was different…I definitely thought the landscape would look a lot different. Um…like I have these pictures in my mind uh…of Africa. Like big plains and um…things like that and I think those were actually sort of a myth (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

Fran also mentioned her expectations for the weather in Botswana, located in southern Africa, to be “hot” and “dry” which differed from the “cold” weather she actually experienced, having traveled in the winter months (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

In addition to being asked about their initial expectations of Africa, participants were also asked “What did you learn about yourself (in regards to your biases, prejudices, values, beliefs etc.) as a result of the study abroad experience?” In response to this question, participants described becoming more aware of the personal biases, presumptions and false ideas they had held regarding the African culture and people and how these factors changed as a result of their cultural immersion experience. For example, Ben describes recurrent interactions that he had with a local man whom had repeatedly asked him for money on several separate occasions. Ben reflects upon his experiences with this man during the interview:
I was in this situation where I see this guy not being able to take care of himself…having been raised as an American, as a White male, there was this unspoken rule that if I can’t take care of myself then there’s something wrong with me…but that’s not the case at all… I should be able to not project my American viewpoint, opinion, even the American situation on him…I had to kind of kind of challenge my own reverse prejudices…I had assumptions that I had to challenge myself because it’s completely different…everybody’s story is different (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

Ben’s reflection supports research indicating that student interactions with individuals of the host country enables one to identify the sources of their values and biases (West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011). It also indicates that as a result of the interaction, Ben developed a new insight and awareness regarding profound American viewpoints and beliefs for which he had developed a personal adherence to throughout his social upbringing. From this final interaction with the man, Ben was also able to acknowledge that his American viewpoints and beliefs were not representative of the viewpoints and beliefs of the people of Africa, and also helped him become aware of how he had unintentionally pushed his own personal beliefs and American assumptions upon others.

Aside from increased awareness of personal biasess, presumptions and false ideas regarding individuals of other races and ethnicities, two participants discussed personal beliefs that they had held regarding their peers and how the cultural immersion experience challenged such beliefs. For example, in regards to multicultural competency development in counseling students, Stacey states:
I think I had expectations of what I thought [where students would be in regards to their level of multicultural development] …Well you’re a first-year master or you’re a first-year doc student, like you should be more culturally aware or whatever… and then I’ve learned to really just accept people where they are in their development…and let go of some of these expectations and meet them where they’re at (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

Similarly, Aubrey confessed negative perceptions she had of a male peer of whom was her roommate for the extent of the trip, and how these perceptions changed as a result of the cultural immersion experience:

Well the person that I got paired with was one of the people that I wanted to be paired with the least. Um…because I felt that he was somebody who…wasn’t aware of white privilege. I felt like he was just like this white frat boy. Like you know…good looking, popular…wouldn’t have empathy with others. When I got paired with him I remember being like “oh you got to be kidding me, like this is who I am going to be with for five weeks?! And, um..I actually think that watching his transformation there and changing the way I thought about him personally, was some of the most, some of the most powerful things that happened to me while I was there. Um…just watching him learning and then watching our relationship build while we were there um…it was really meaningful to me… but I think in person it was probably right about…among other things about him. But, I don’t think he was like that when we left there and then we just for one it's a testimony of how people can change when they have certain experiences (Aubrey, personal communication. September 25, 2015).
Aubrey explains that she believes it is the “very specific experiences that we had there”, such as being discriminated against, that had attributed to her own newly developed insight regarding her tendency to falsely judge others (Aubrey, personal communication. September 25, 2015). Ben and Aubrey’s reflections regarding their newly formed recognition that their personal biases, presumptions and perceptions of the African culture were false or inaccurate supports research that students become more “intimately in tune” with the stereotypes and views they hold of others who are different from oneself as a result of studying abroad (Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall, 2014).

**Knowledge of self.** Counselor Educators have long recognized the important role that self-awareness and personal growth plays in a student’s professional development and counseling efficacy, as initially suggested by Carl Rogers (as cited in Seligman and Reichenberg) in his theory of person-centered counseling that self-awareness reflects “emotional health” that is a “characteristic to the fully functioning person” (p. 151). Literature further asserts that self-awareness is a critical pre-cursor to becoming a multiculturally competent counselor and that, while various traditional methods for fostering self-awareness exist, studying abroad is a unique experience of which inherently elicits student development of knowledge of oneself (Fouad & Arrendondo, 2003; West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011; Williams, 2003). Given this empirical evidence, the researcher inquired about students’ development of personal self-awareness by asking participants “What did you hope to achieve in regards to personal growth from this experience?” The following participant responses refer to how studying abroad influenced their development of self-awareness and personal growth. For example, Fran explains:
I think traveling abroad…there’s always an opportunity to just step outside yourself, to get a better look at how you, how you act and react in everyday life. And what you can change about that and what you can accept…Going to Botswana in particular reminded me that I um, that I’m not the center…and it’s very easy to get wrapped up in our own perceptions and our own wants and needs, but, I think something that I learned that is that there’s, there’s always something greater. There’s, there’s always a bigger purpose going on and I, recognizing that for me, I really do work much better in small groups and one-on-ones. And as much as I enjoy speaking and interacting I really find that my best work is one when I can look another individual in the eye and have an in-depth conversation and be able to find some common ground. (Fran, personal communication, October 15, 2015).

Fran’s reflection of having the “opportunity to just step outside yourself” via traveling to Botswana echoes research on study abroad in which the experience is compared to “a mirror in which an increasing awareness of one’s own self and one’s own cultural context takes place (Platt, 2012)”. As she continues, Fran reflects upon how traveling to Botswana made her aware of her of the fact that while she enjoys public speaking, she works more effectively conversing on an individual basis with others and of her tendency to focus on her own wants and needs, rather than the needs of others.

For other participants, negative feelings such as fear, anxiety, and discomfort surrounding the experience of traveling to Africa influenced their development of personal growth and self-awareness. For example, Aubrey discusses her initial fear of traveling to Botswana:
I was really, really afraid to go… and right before we left, I remember thinking, like I didn’t want to go. But, I was going to make myself go. Um… I was really, really afraid… I think it felt different [for herself] than it felt to some other people. I felt when I was going, that it was something I had to get through and I think other people were like really excited. Um… and I felt like it was going to be a good experience, but I was just afraid. I was just afraid. And it made me feel like, I could do things I was afraid of. You know, in spite of being afraid of them (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

This quote from Aubrey indicates that she recognized that how her negative feelings regarding her decision to travel to Botswana was different from many of her peers. While literature suggests that studying abroad allows students to form new perceptions of themselves in relation to others, Aubrey’s reflection represents how she was feeling before the study abroad experience occurred and there is no indication that this is something she learned about herself as a result of the immersion experience (Burnett, Hamel & Long, 2004). Although for a different reason, Stacey also endorses the feelings of anxiety she had regarding her decision to travel to Botswana before the immersion experience:

I was anticipating that there would be growth for me, you know being out of my comfort zone. I wasn’t as familiar with HIV/AIDS. I knew that I would have a trigger with that, in some way, because I suffered a loss when I was younger. I had a sibling that passed. So, I was aware that this might be triggering for me in some ways and then, it was triggered in a lot of ways … (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).
In addition to being asked what participants hoped to gain in regards to personal growth from the study abroad experience, they were also asked “What were some of the most stressful moments of the study abroad experience?” While all participants shared at least one stressful moment, three participants referred to feeling vulnerable and/unsafe as the most stressful aspect of traveling to Africa. For example, Ben states:

I hated showing up [arriving in South Africa] at night. I hated that. Um, I hated showing up in the dark. Not being able to get my bearing as to where I was and then particularly being comfortable that I could trust, that I could sleep at this place...so feeling vulnerable, just that uneasiness (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

Ben discusses another experience in which he felt unsafe and vulnerable, in which the group took a formal tour of a local township:

I remember that one night we went to that bar and we ate and played drums with everybody...I remember becoming very aware that, that was probably the worst neighborhood I had ever been in my entire life, you know? I remember us coming out, and we were coming out late, like...It was dark and it was night time...I remember everything being rolled up and shut down. You know what I mean, like the death squad was getting ready to roll through or something like that. You know what I mean, it’s like my time to be safe, and you are on the wrong damn side of the road and you are going to kill us. So, um, it’s just that vulnerability. That’s probably something that I really wasn’t prepared for (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).
Ben however was the only member who expressed feeling vulnerable and unsafe when taking part of an event that had been planned and faculty-led while abroad. Two other participants, Elaine and Aubrey expressed feeling especially vulnerable during times in which they were independent from the rest of the group, for example when left to visit the local city, to go shopping or to restaurants, etc. For example, while Elaine admits that getting to know local people that belonged to her approximate age group was a positive learning experience, she also indicates feeling vulnerable and unsafe, as she explains:

> We got pretty close with him [a local male who taught the group to play the drums during a group function] and a few of his friends and um, kind of hung out with him quite a bit. I think it is one of those things where, you, you know you feel like you’re getting to know them, but yet, it’s not really who they are, they might be lying or taking advantage of you type of situation. I mean it was kind of nice...I feel like we were immersed in the culture a little bit more because we got to interact with them, but, in the same sense you know, it’s almost like, I don’t know, I guess we felt like of taken advantage of a little bit or something like that (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).

Aubrey attributes feeling vulnerable to obvious language barriers, including the inability to understand the native language. However, her expressed feelings of intimidation, anxiety and fear to walk alone might further indicate other presumptions she held regarding being a White American traveling in Botswana. Such presumptions, such as the fear of being discriminated against, may also have attributed to her feelings of vulnerability, aside from the evident language barriers.
I felt like, a lot of us were in a very vulnerable position there and especially not understanding the language. I think that was big as well. Like not understanding. Know that people were talking about us sometimes, but not really know what they were saying was difficult and sometimes a little bit intimidating I think. Um…and I guess I can’t really imagine…I mean maybe I’m wrong about this, but I can’t really imagine a time, if we were in the United States…where I would have felt similar. So, for example, like we walked to the [volunteer site] everyday together by ourselves [her and a male peer]. There was a part of me that, like I wouldn’t have walked by myself there. I was nervous, sort of (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

According to research, student feelings of fear, anxiety, and discomfort may lead to resistance and withdrawal in the classroom, thereby hindering a student’s ability to develop multicultural sensitivity and skills. However, in a cultural immersion experience students have an extended amount of time to reflect upon their experiences, thereby allowing for student transformation from resistance to reflection to occur (West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta, & Templeton, 2012). This process of moving from resistance to reflection is evidenced in participant responses in this study, as they disclosed feelings of anxiety, fear, vulnerability, and uncertainty they had regarding studying abroad in Africa and how, through challenging themselves to confront their fears, they became more aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses. Aubrey’s response further indicates how having developed an increased awareness her personal strengths resulted in an increased self-confidence, which also supports existing literature regarding cultural immersion’s ability to positively influence student development of self-
confidence, as students must learn to function successfully in a foreign environment different from one’s own (Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007). Participant responses also support research that, while such stressors may be detrimental to a student’s overall health and well-being, they can be beneficial to personal growth. For example, according to Cressy (2000), when one travels abroad they are forced to negotiate their way around new territory, language, and customs which may “shock” the person into a newly developed sense of self-awareness (a concept she described as “culture shock”).

This theme further indicates that another critical factor that may be attributable to student development of self-awareness via studying abroad is having the ability to appropriately process such unique and challenging experiences with others. Per program curriculum requirements, students not only kept written journals of their daily experiences but also engaged in weekly group discussions with peers (facilitated by the program leader) to process their weekly experiences. During interviews, participants were asked to describe those group experiences that were most meaningful to them, and many participants discussed the value that this had upon their overall personal growth and development. For example, Fran states “It was good to hear other people…I think part of our skills is understanding the narrative and being able to process that out loud…the opportunity to hear what others were going through in their placement was definitely helpful (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015)”. Similarly, Ben indicates that he enjoyed being able to process experiences outside of weekly formal group sessions: “I really enjoyed the car ride home from the places we were working because we really go to experience a little bit of what they [the other students] experienced, you know, at the other [volunteer sites] (Ben, personal communication,
September 25, 2015).” Gena also discusses how the informal group experiences allowed her to not only reflect upon her own personal experiences and to be able to learn about the experiences of others, but that it also allowed to her to bond with her peers. Gena states:

It was really a bonding experience for all of us…we would all be eating together and people would talk about their day and what they were doing at their placement and kind of like vicariously learning through them in a sense and like their experience (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Stacey explains that the majority of her self-reflection occurred with one close friend that she bonded with during the experience in addition to the program leader:

I had conversations with my good friend that was there and then, I sought out [the program leader] and talking to him you know, about some things and some challenges…I trust him and I felt supported by him and I knew if I needed anything that he would be there and he was there, even afterwards, to help process things (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

It is evident from Stacey’ statement that she places a significant value on her not just the positive relationship that existed with this program leader but also her ability to discuss and process her experiences with him on an individual basis, recognizing the important role that program leaders hold in facilitating such programs. Two other participants also endorsed having a positive relationship with the program leader and that this factor attributed to their decision to initially enroll in the study abroad program to Africa. This supports research by Brown (1995) of whom stressors the “critical role” that program leaders play in encouraging and validating students’ reflections of their experiences, as
such processing is considered a necessary factor in student development of self-awareness.

**Awareness of economic privilege.** While studying abroad affords students an opportunity to learn about diverse cultures from a unique perspective, the experience can have serious ramifications for American students. Research evaluating the impact of study abroad indicates that as students are exposed to the real-life struggles of the third-world culture (such as poverty and oppression), many develop an increased recognition for the privilege that they hold as an American (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; McDowell, Goessling & Malendez, 2012; Themundo, Page & Bendander, 2007). This theme supports such literature, as five participant responses to the interview question “What did you notice about power, prestige and privilege during your experience?” indicate that they had developed a heightened awareness of their economic privilege from studying abroad in Africa. For example, Ben defined his privilege as being raised as an American that has the power and opportunity to travel almost effortlessly and at a convenience:

> You know, my father in law passed away while we were there and it was an option for me to go travel to the other side of the planet to attend a funeral. That was an option. Wherein, the people that we worked with at that orphanage, you know, that as not an option for them to go across town and we take things for granted. And you know, that’s the thing, that privilege is mine as an American. I can just take that blue document that I walk around with when I travel abroad and go up to an airport with a piece of plastic and say, get me on the next flight out of here and it’s done. And that’s the advantage I have (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).
Similarly, Stacey speaks about American privilege in the economic aspect, not just in having the opportunity to travel to a third-world country, but more importantly as having the opportunity to return to the United States from the third-world country after a month-long period. She explains:

They [the people of Africa] can’t leave after a month like I had the opportunity to leave, right? Like, because I was just going and coming back. So, you know, there was privilege in that, that I had economic privilege of being able to go over there, to experience it, and then I had the privilege to not be in it anymore. To go back to my comfort zone. But, some people don’t have that (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

While Diane agrees that Americans have special privileges, particularly the opportunity to obtain a higher level of education, Diane also indicates feeling as though Americans are judged as having such privilege when this might not be true for all Americans:

I always get nervous traveling to other countries because I think Americans have this very arrogant privilege of kind of air about us and I think we…I think it…I think is portrayed on us, and also true. I think people assume that if we are getting [a graduate degree] that we are privileged. Um, and I would argue in comparison to South African’s we probably are. Even regardless of our [personal] circumstances [as an American]. The fact that we have an opportunity to get a Higher Education, to me is a form of privilege (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015).
Aubrey voiced similar concern regarding how Americans may be perceived due to such privilege as she describes one of her earliest experiences in Botswana, that occurred while exchanging currency at a local bank:

In a way, I felt like we still had privilege… I felt like people looked at us and thought we would have money sort of… I remember feeling like, that we deserved [being looked at] because we have power all the time here. I still felt badly, but I felt like. I don’t know. I felt like...I think I thought a lot of guilt for the White privilege that I have here. And I was aware of that before, but when I went there and I just…it...I felt a lot, a lot of guilt for that (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

Aubrey’s response reflects findings by Canfield, Low and Hovestadt (2009) who found that graduate students studying abroad in Thailand voiced feeling as though they “stood out” due to their access to resources (e.g. staying at expensive hotels) and had voiced further concern over how such privilege was being perceived by people of the host country while they were abroad. Aubrey also mentioned feeling “guilty” for having such privilege (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015). Two other participants, Stacey and Elaine also elaborate on the aspect of privilege by associating it feelings of guilt that they each experienced as being an American traveling in Botswana. For example, Elaine states:

I definitely feel like we are privileged here. I feel like we have more resources available to us um you know, I feel like with education our incomes are higher to be able to pay for more things. But honestly, there is almost like a kind of guilty feeling I have…guilty as in, not being able to do more to help, because I see it as,
you know, we all live in the same world. Even though we are on two different
continents or whatever, I mean… I still feel like we all have to help each other, so
part of me feels a little bit guilt that I couldn’t make more of a different or do
more even being from [America] (Elaine, personal communication, October 11,
2015).

In a similar manner, Stacey was the only participant to mention feeling guilty due to her
good health, as an American who was not born with HIV/AIDS:

>You know, um, and so, that...I felt a lot of guilt over like, I just dropped in and this
is my study abroad and I am getting my doctorate and I have extra money where I
can come and see your lives and now I am going to go back to my life. You
know? Like, wow, that's like, um...this isn’t really fair. Like, why was I born like
this and why was I not born like one of those kids who had HIV/Aids and they
were born that way. They didn’t have any choice…And that lingers (Stacey,
personal communication, September 28, 2015).

While Aubrey, Elaine and Stacey all associate they privilege they hold as an American
with feelings of guilt, Elaine is the only participant of the three to have mentioned feeling
guilty for “not being able to do more to help” and wanting to “make a difference (Elaine,
personal communication, October 11, 2015).” Her statement reflects that with privilege
comes the responsibility to help others. This supports findings by McDowell, Goessling
and Malendez (2012) who suggested that students who had first-hand experiences with
poverty felt the need to be accountable and/or socially responsible for helping to resolve
the issue.
This theme supports such literature as five participant responses indicate that they had developed a heightened awareness of their economic privilege from studying abroad in Africa for similar, yet varying reasons: for being White, for being an American, or for being a White American. In any sense, participant responses described privilege as not just economic and/or financial privilege but also as having other advantages such as the ability to receive a higher education and affordable opportunities. This refutes criticisms found in cultural immersion literature that students remain resistant to acknowledging their position of privilege, despite the amount of time spent in the foreign culture (Butin, 2005a, 2005b; Jones, Gilbrid-Brown & Gasioriski, 2005; Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007).

**Changed view of American culture.** Counseling literature has explored the connection between the development of cultural identity and engagement in cultural immersion experiences and there is substantial evidence that suggesting that exposure to a foreign culture affords students the opportunity to think critically about their own culture, to critique their own values, norms and practices and to evaluate how their upbringing made them the person they are (Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1990; McDowell, Goessling & Melendez, 2012). Specifically, research suggests that studying abroad can elicit a change in student’s attitude and perceptions of their home country in a manner that is nearly impossible to learn outside of a cultural immersion experience (Carlson & Widaman, 1998; Themundo, Page & Benander; 2007) While students may experience a positive change, such as feeling grateful for having an improved appreciation for have readily-available resources, research also suggests that traveling abroad can also have a negative impact on one’s sense of cultural identity, as students
may become aware of the cultural encapsulation in which they were raised (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007).

These research findings are supported in this study. When participants were asked “How did your view of the American culture change as a result of the study abroad experience?”, five participants discuss their changed views of America after traveling to Africa including their perceptions of the American people as materialistic and/or having an abundance of resources, as egocentric and having a lack of universal understanding, and as preoccupied and hurried. For example, Stacey discusses how she struggled with other Americans’ lack of resourcefulness upon her immediate return from Botswana:

I felt like I had a hard time with connecting with people about what was really important in the world and I remember when I came back…um, I remember it was like, the week after I was back I was with my sister in Columbus and we went to go [shopping] and…I came out of the bathroom and I was sitting and waiting and this other woman came out of this other bathroom and started complaining to the staff ‘There were no paper towels in there’. And meanwhile, I just got back from Botswana where you know, you no toilet paper…But, I had an urge to yell at that woman and tell her she’s an idiot and you know, you don’t know what’s going on in the world, like kids are dying from HIV/AIDS and here this woman is complaining because there isn’t anything to wipe your hands after you have soap and water. I remember thinking; I’m going to lose it, like these people [fellow Americans] have no idea what it is really about. Like, they have no idea how other people live. What we [as Americans] spend our time and energy on and it felt like a lot of things to use were really superficial...what I tell myself,
like…they haven’t had the experiences or they haven’t gone to Botswana and
back you know…they’re a product of our society, right? In their little bubble, you
know and if you stay in your little bubble then that’s probably all you’re going to
know (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

Stacey voices the frustration she experienced upon returning home and her feeling that
Americans lack knowledge about the African culture, and specifically the struggles that
the people of Africa are experience due to lack of having access to basic, everyday
necessities. Research has found that students who travel abroad have voiced similar
frustrations on how little Americans actually know about other cultures (Themundo, Page
& Benander, 2007). Diane also describes the emotional discord she experienced upon
returning home from South Africa while shopping with her sister and being confronted
with an abundance of items for purchase:

I remember the first time I went to Wal-Mart when we got back and I was like,
this is too much. Like this is not needed. Like this is so overboard, so extra, that
it’s just like…why, why are we doing this? And I just got really annoyed and I had
to go back out to the car. And I was like, I left my family and I’m like, you guys
go shopping, I can’t do this, I am sitting in the car. It was just too much. Like
people are so gluttonous, they have too extra and they have to have this sand they
have to have that and it’s just so annoying (Diane, personal communication,
September 29, 2015).

Stacey and Diane’s’ reflections echo research on how student’s cultural perceptions
change as a result of studying abroad. In a study by Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004)
students returning from a study abroad experience to Ireland voiced animosity and
referred to America as a “spoiled (p. 159)” and ego-centric country. While Diane and Stacey discuss having an increased recognition as Americans being materialistic and/or having an abundance of resources, Gena expressed how her cultural immersion experience in Botswana made her less tolerant of Americans’ lack of knowledge of HIV/AIDS and/or stigma and insensitivity towards those with HIV/AIDS:

Before [the cultural immersion experience], I think I was little hyper sensitive to um the way people talked about or responded to knowing someone has an HIV or AIDS diagnosis and the like overly-phobic like responses people can have about that in terms of like being a...basically afraid of someone, um and that was like extra offensive to me when I came back because like I would just have these flashbacks of like these little, these little kids that um were HIV and AIDS positive and like it wasn’t. I don't know like just thinking about them and then like seeing like their reaction or like the facial expression of someone in the United States when talking about HIV AIDS, like that bothered me a lot more when I was back. …um someone would like ask me, and it shouldn't bother me because they probably just aren't educated about it, but like someone would ask me something like, "but weren't you afraid that like you would get it" or like something like that and I'm like, are you serious, please (laughs)... (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

While Diane and Stacey refer to Americans as having an abundance of resources and Gena discusses the lack of education, insensitivity and stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS in America, Ben describes his frustration with America’s lack of progress towards racial and ethnic unity, as he observed in South Africa during his cultural immersion experience:
I think that there are different agendas here [in America] and there aren’t so many different agendas there [in South Africa]. You know, I think a lot of time we like to racially charge the social issues. You know, the availability of free housing in South Africa is universally accepted and viewed as you know, benefit by all races if you will, more so than here…because they have collectively decided that they need to put [racial segregation] behind them. They work towards that. Like and I don’t know how that works in America. I don’t see that happening in America. And these guys just said ‘Hey, here’s another person that can help and I can help by building a yard shed in the backyard, run electricity to it and I’m letting them shower in the place and feeding him three times a day…Sure, they still have homeless problems. We still have homeless problems and that sort of thing, but there’s just this willingness to be able to simplify a problem and not be concerned about whether or not someone is abusing it because they are [person-centered]

(Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

In a similar aspect, Aubrey’s exposure to Botswana traditions and the people’s simplistic lifestyle, such as ‘tea time’, has led her to become more aware of the fast-paced American lifestyle to which she is used to living:

I remember [an employee at the volunteer site] saying, ‘Oh we love having Americans here. They get so much done.’ And it’s like, yeah, that’s probably true. But it’s sort of detrimental. Like…we didn’t watch television unless we went to like what, a soccer game or something. We weren’t multi-tasking. Like Zach and I would go, I remember at the counseling center, we would get some tea and these cookies and we would go and sit out in the sun and for like, a while. You know
and that’s what we were doing. Like, which is to me, is doing nothing, but there it’s like, what you are doing is having tea. And it’s just like kind of taught me…and this is something that I was not able to hold onto and I wish that I could’ve, but maybe we don’t need to be constantly going. Maybe we don’t need to be constantly moving. Maybe this is not the best way to be (Aubrey, personal communication., September 25, 2015).

Aubrey’s newly developed insight regarding her tendency as an American to be “constantly going” (and particularly how such a lifestyle may be unhealthy) is reflective of research by Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins and Hall (2014) who found that while abroad, students had perceived the Belizean people as having a higher appreciation for their culture and relationships with others, in comparison to the American culture. Furthermore, these five participant responses by Stacey, Diane, Gena, Ben and Aubrey indicate that as a result of studying abroad in Africa, students had the opportunity to experience, reflect upon and compare the cultural values, norms and practices of the African country to their own American culture, as McDowell, Goessling and Melendez (2012) suggests.

**Aspect Two: Multicultural Awareness**

The second aspect identified in the exploration of the lived experiences of counseling students developing multicultural competency by participating in a cultural immersion experience to Africa is the development of multicultural awareness, defined as having an increased awareness of others’ cultural values, customs, expectations, and worldviews (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). Research suggests that cultural immersion experiences can be a significant factor in the development of multicultural
awareness. For example, West-Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta, and Templeton (2012) found that cultural immersion experiences allow the opportunity for students to “witness the community’s authentic voice” and native practices such as singing, dancing, meditation and prayer (p. 344). Also, cultural immersion experiences have been reported to allow students to experience “a new way of life”, “the kindness of strangers”, and the “meaning of friendship” with members of the foreign population (Themudo, Page & Benander, 2007, p. 73). In this study, participants were asked “How well would you say know the African culture after this experience?” Participant’s responses were grouped into five corresponding themes: 1) Knowledge of HIV/AIDS, 2) Knowledge of African Culture, 3) Knowledge of People of Africa, 4) Knowledge of Poverty, and 5) Knowledge of Mental Health Counseling in Africa.

**Knowledge of HIV/AIDS in Africa.** When participants were asked what they had learned about the African culture during interviews, two participants indicated learning about the various aspects surrounding HIV/AIDS pandemic as a result of participating in the cultural immersion experiences to Botswana and South Africa. This is a significant as by participating in the program, participants were expected to have gained an understanding of HIV/AIDS organizations and their operations, to become familiar with the skills necessary for successful HIV/AIDS programming, and to gain an understanding of the impact of HIV/AIDS upon the society as well as society’s response to HIV/AIDS (Pillay, 2011). For example, Elaine discusses how her volunteer work, which required providing education regarding safe-sex practices to children of all ages with HIV/AIDS, increased her knowledge not only regarding myths, stereotypes of
HIV/AIDS but also, her understanding of just how prevalent HIV/AIDS amongst families and the African community:

Just learning about the lack of education about HIV/AIDS and…I mean I had so many conversations with people about like safe sex. It was kind of ridiculous...Um, but it was sort of any eye-opener of you know, helping people learning about that stuff. It was pretty neat. I guess it kind of amazed me because I thought if anywhere like that would be the place where they knew all of this information because it’s such a big issue there. But that was not the case. I felt like you know, there was a huge lack of education about that there and just having those interactions with those individuals was kind of…it was nice that I could make a difference, you know, something that I thought they guess should have already known…I think there are a lot of myths that kind of exist there…And I feel like until you actually go and experience it, I mean you can’t truly understand and appreciate what that means…Um, that was like a huge, huge eye-opener to me. How significant of a problem that really was compared to here you know. I don’t really know many people with that challenge in their life and I go there were there’s many and you’re like in a home with everybody that’s almost diagnosed with HIV or AIDS…but it wasn’t their only disability, so…I mean you are dealing with people with multiple disabilities there (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).

In her reflection, Elaine discusses how traveling to Africa made her realize just how significant of a problem HIV/AIDS is in Africa specifically in regards to the numbers of
people that are affected by the virus. Elaine’s statements regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic is similar to Fran’s reflection of her experiences. She states:

Even though HIV is not spoken of as much in our media and in other form of communication. It’s still very prevalent and it’s uh very, very powerful and a scary thing that people have to deal with and we need to be aware of that (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2016).

Fran also reflects upon her recollection of visiting various hospice centers in Botswana and how this helped her become aware of the significant prevalence of HIV/AIDS and the impact that it has on families:

The hospices had a children program for orphans who lost parents from [HIV/AIDS] and then went to live with aunts and uncles and then lost aunts and uncles to HIV/AIDS. So it was really a lot of kind of elders coming together to take care of all the children and it didn’t matter whose child you were because you became the child of the community as a necessity (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2016).

Additionally, Stacey discusses how her volunteer work at a family clinic for HIV-infected children and families in Botswana exposed her to some of the logistical challenges and systematic barriers to HIV/AIDS treatment, including the ongoing stigma associated with HIV/AIDS:

I think I learned a lot of about some of the challenges like, you know, with the system and with HIV/AIDS like, there were some more like logistic stuff. I understand about drug adherence. Like we put together this pamphlet and I learned about some cultural and some local and conceptual factors as to why
[individuals are not receiving antiretroviral therapy]. Because before I went over, like ‘the ARV’s are free, what aren’t people taking them? Why are kids still sick? It makes no sense. If their free, they should be taking them’…And so, I know going over there I learned a lot about, well, here’s some barriers and this is why [kids are still sick], it makes more sense, as opposed to me being judg[mental]…I learned a lot about the stigma over there with HIV/AIDS (Stacey, personal communication. September 28, 2015).

Elaine and Stacey’s reflections refer to how their preconceived assumptions and judgements regarding HIV/AIDS stigma, prevention and research were challenged as a result of interacting and working directly with local organizations. Furthermore, in providing education about HIV/AIDS to individuals and families in Africa, they were about to learn first-hand about the profound stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and the significant barriers to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention.

Knowledge of culture of Africa. Just as working with local community organizations expanded Elaine and Stacey’s knowledge HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention in Africa, research has also found that there are unique aspects of studying abroad, such as listening to demonstrations and engaging in lectures with local scholars, that can further influence student learning of multicultural knowledge (Barden, Shannonhouse & Mobley, 2015; Boyle-Baise, 2002; Guth, McAuliffe & Michalak, 2014; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Mather, 2008; Monard-Weissman, 2003; O’Grady, 2000). This theme supports such research findings, as six of the seven participants discussed developing knowledge regarding various aspects of the African culture including the various races, spoken languages, religions, tribal life, African dance and music and other
customs and traditions. For example, Elaine emphasizes that while she was aware of the numerous cultures that existed within the continent of Africa before traveling, “I knew nothing about those cultures in general.” Elaine continues on to explain that by traveling to South Africa and “being able to live there and talking to people [of those cultures], I would say I’ve learned quite a bit from them specifically…I’ve learned that there’s Blacks, there’s also Browns, there’s White people and about like the Afrikaans [language] (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).

Similarly, Diane discusses learning about the tribal cultures of Africa. Despite that she was not directly exposed to tribal communities during her cultural immersion experience, Diane describes learning about tribal life and culture through program lectures she attended at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa (a required part of the cultural immersion program curriculum) as significant to not just her development of multicultural knowledge but also to the development of her own cultural identity as a Native American:

One of the things I learned [from the lectures at NMMU] is how there is still tribes in Africa; people who live in huts and you know, practice medicine and stuff like that…that reminded me a lot of Native American and like our way of life…their education is very similar to Native education, which is, you know, if my neighbor is sick then I am sick; if my neighbor is poor than I am poor because we respect each other. I was raised with that and I don’t see that really in the United States (rarely beyond Native Americans) but it was really cool to see it in Africa (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015).
While both Elaine and Diane discussed learning about Africa from the study abroad experience, their responses demonstrate that this learning occurred through different avenues; for Elaine, learning occurred as a result of interacting with community members while Diane reported that her learning occurred from participating in lectures at the foreign university. This supports research that student development of cultural knowledge does not occur solely through having direct interactions with community members (as some research suggests) but that such knowledge may also be influenced by other academic activities such as engaging in seminars and discussions by local scholars or by visiting museums and community agencies. For example, Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004) evaluated the long-term effect of studying abroad on undergraduate and graduate counseling students studying abroad in Ireland found that students learned several factors about the Irish culture including its history, the value of religion and education that the Irish people hold, and the importance they place upon citizen’s rights after listening to seminars and discussions led by Irish scholars.

Similarly, Ben also explains that he now has an increased level of knowledge regarding the African culture as a result of studying abroad, specifically in regards to South African’s political and social connection to Australia. He states:

I think one thing that I was really surprised about what I think is their connection to Australia. I’d never considered that before. I guess I never considered that kind of connection that they would have and really, they were a lot alike (Ben, personal communication, September 2015).

Ben’s recognition of the South African and Australian relationship is accurate.
(2016), Australia and South Africa have held close political and economic relations after establishing diplomatic relations in 1947. Additionally, Australia supported the global resolutions to end apartheid in South Africa in the 1990’s. Ben reports that this newly developed knowledge regarding Australia’s contribution and connection to South Africa’s economic and political growth can be attributed to his participation in the cultural immersion experience, which supports research indicating that when studying abroad and becoming informed of local surroundings and communities, students are able to learn about the social, political and historical aspects of the host country (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clare, 2010).

While Elaine, Diane and Ben refer to knowledge they obtained regarding the African cultural makeup, other participants discussed other various aspects of the African culture that they learned about during their travels to Botswana and South Africa. For example, Stacey discusses how she came to learn of the distinctive value of Soccer in Africa:

I didn’t anticipate learning about soccer, but they call it football. That was one sport that I never played and I’m like, I’m an athlete and I play like, basketball, volleyball, softball and stuff. I never liked soccer. And when I went over there, that is how when I was working at [her volunteer site], like that's a lot of times how I communicate with the kids is like, they were going to play soccer and they would teach me how to play. And then at night, we would play games at the University of Botswana that...we would play sometimes with everybody. You know, [the program leader at the university of Botswana] would play and some of his friends and so, that's how we bonded there too. And then, people I worked
with had tickets to the World Cup Games in South Africa. So, I went there and watched a World Cup game and experienced this whole other culture that I had no idea about and then I thought soccer was just this stupid sport. I learned a lot about the culture and people through soccer and I was able to connect with people through the sport. I loved the dance part of the culture too, like um, and the music, like that was awesome and learned about their land and animals and stuff. I think was interesting to learn about. And food? Even though I was vegetarian, that was kind of hard. I didn’t eat a lot of the stuff. But, um, you know, it was interesting. I actually craved some of the [foods] when I came home (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

Stacey has described a newly established personal respect that she has developed for the sport of Soccer, as she explains how she used Soccer as a form of communicating and connecting with people of Botswana in more than one social situation. Aubrey, also a vegetarian, expressed a similar difficulty regarding finding adequate food for her to eat that met her dietary restrictions while abroad in Botswana by stating “I thought it would be difficult for me to find something to eat because I don’t eat meat and I would expect that [the people of Africa] would think that was odd. And that was actually kind of true. (Aubrey, personal communication. September 25, 2015).” Gena describes that while eating abroad she became familiarized with the African custom of sharing food, as she states “people just really wanting to like share their food with each other…you were expected to like share your food with like the people like around you (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).”
Knowledge of people of Africa. While participants described having an increased knowledge regarding general aspects of the African culture, participants attributed their most pivotal and impactful learning experiences to the specific, unique individual interactions they had with the indigenous people while abroad. Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) suggests that it is such prolonged, cross-cultural contact with local community members that has a significant effect in student’s ability to learn about people from other cultures, specifically in recognizing and dispelling myths about the host country. This theme is critical as it supports current research that suggests cultural immersion experiences provide students with the “capability to relate to people across differences and to form deep and meaningful interactions with individuals who are different from oneself… [and is] an essential aspect for building the bridge to close the societal gaps that separate people” (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Mather, 2008; Monard-Weissman 2003; O’Grady, 2000). When asked to describe their specific interactions with African natives, five participants referred to them as the greatest memories and/or most meaningful aspect of the cultural immersion experience. Three of the five participants report that such interactions formed with while working as a volunteer, including Stacey, Diane and Fran. Fran describes her experience:

Um, one of the more powerful things that happened to me when I was there was visiting a hospice and… you have to register at a center to get your HIV meds and wherever you register is the only place you can go to get those meds. I don't know if it's changed in the past few years but at that point that was the practice. And so um I had the opportunity to walk with a young woman from the hospice to the center to get her medication and she was maybe 20...maybe, super thin, sick,
walked with a cane, like poster child for illness and you know here I am like very healthy, well fed person (laughs), you know walking with her and you and the you know seeing the differences and not just um, they were all superficial, they were all superficial differences. And as we walked along, um we took back these paths, like none on the main street but there are a lot of little paths that cut through and there are these little stands that are set up that are called tuck shops. You can get a little thing to tuck in and they're usually like one pula or whatever and uh we were walking by and she asked me if I wanted anything and I said, "No I'm fine. No, I'm good." So, we walked on a little more and she stumbled and I reached out to grab her and then I put my hand on hers and she looked me...huge eyes and her jaw dropped and asking me to apologize for touching her without her permission but I wasn't thinking, I didn't you know you don't want people to fall and she said, "No, no, no, that's okay, that's okay." And I took my hand away and we walked on a little bit more, she started to stumble again, I reached my hand out again and she grabbed my hand and she just held my hand as we walked the rest of the way to the center and that was very powerful for me because at the time I thought, "well huh that's something." (Laughs) But then I realized it was probably, it had been a long time since someone voluntarily reached out to touch her that wasn't a part of the hospice or medical. And on the way back, um to the hospice after she had gotten her meds and we had met a couple people and talked a little bit, she was obviously tired and uh and she called me her sister and said, "from now on you and I are sisters and we walked together". And that, that was pivotal. That was probably the, the singular moment I would say of my time there, even though
there were lots of incredible moments that, that I learned from and I'm sure have affected me in some way. But that one I think because it really hit home, the fact that we you know, we do concentrate so much on superficial things and it's just a simple kindness of holding someone's hand...That can make such an impact (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Like Fran, Gena discusses the relationship she formed with another individual as one of the most “meaningful” moments of the cultural immersion experience in Botswana. She describes the friendship she developed with a native South African woman:

She actually was a student at um, the University of Botswana and like we still occasionally interact on Facebook and, um so I think that forming that relationship really meant a lot. And like she taught me a lot about like the cultural differences uh and that was really interesting to me, um so that was one of the most I would say most meaningful things to me outside my [volunteer work] (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Gena refers to Tato throughout the interview, including times that she spent with Tato outside of the university in addition to meeting Tato’s friends, further indicating the value that Gena places upon her relationship with Tato.

Both Fran and Gena’s experiences are unique in that their interactions occurred with one other sole individual, whereas Stacey and Elaine’s meaningful interactions occurred while engaged with a group of individuals. For example, Stacey discusses the mixed emotions she felt in reading a story to children at her volunteer site:

I remember one day and this is probably one of my favorite memories, is I was so, the kids were outside and I was doing a little group with them and you know, their
wearing they’re wearing their little Christmas sweaters [laughing] and their little


turtlenecks and the kids had pretty bad hygiene, they just did you know, and I


remember the ones wanted me to get a book and there was like four kids all


around me at this table and they each had like, dragon breath…I was never so


happy. Like reading this book and laughing and smiling, but then. Like the lack of


hygiene, so it was like this mixed emotion, but it was like, it was one of my best


stories there. It was so simple and reading this book and then smiling and


laughing and just smelling their dragon breath. I don’t know it was just


very…only like bizarre kind of experiences like that where just like…like my


heart stopped and then it, was beating so fast…It was a pretty incredible


experience (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).


Elaine discusses a similar meaningful group interaction as Stacey, also occurring at her


volunteer site and while working with a group of young children:


When I was working at the Aids Haven [a foster home for children of all ages


with HIV/AIDS] um, like I could have a natural like momma instincts when I


worked there and I think a lot of the kids felt very comfortable coming to me and


even like the babies and this and that. I mean, I would have like ten kids that I was


watching and playing and stuff. But, it was so amazing to see how care free they


were, non-judgmental, like they just didn’t think of me as anything different. Like


it was just so natural to them versus interacting with adults you know, and it is


very different. You’re always asked questions and stuff, so I think it's kind of the


interaction with children and you know, I think their interest in like touching their


skin and stuff like that, um…but…I guess like verbally or whatever, it was just
kind of, it was very different which was really cool to experience (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).

Diane’s meaningful interaction is unique from Stacey and Elaine’s; although it occurred in a group setting and with individuals she had met from her volunteer site, this meaningful experience occurred when she was invited to a family dinner by a native of whom she had met through her volunteer work. Diane explains the unique circumstances surrounding this encounter and the meaning she interpreted from this experience:

So, a lot of people traveled different distances to get there. Well, we had dinner and then we did like this little dance thing and we were dancing and like…some people started to leave. So, the first um, individuals that started to leave were traveling through um, like an unsafe area. So, everybody in the home and there was probably, um, I would say fifteen to twenty people in like this tiny little house. Um, everybody in the home, she said ‘Everybody say your own prayers in your own language.’ So, all the different languages are at this like, very low whispering volume saying prayers for just two individuals to get home safely. Like that was all were praying for. Um, so it kind of, for me, it was the moment of just very appreciative of life and um, just that time together (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015).

Diane’s reflection of the experience portrays the value that this group of diverse individuals (many of whom were strangers to one another and spoke different languages) placed upon the human trait of supporting and caring for one another, for including one another and on spending time together. Both Diane and Fran’s experiences demonstrate how their ability to learn, through their unique interactions with the people of Africa,
about the sacred African values of togetherness, inclusion and mutuality. All of the participant’s reflections in this theme referred to the positive, meaningful interactions they each personally had with native people of Africa, and how such interactions fostered their knowledge and understanding of the people of Africa. This supports aforementioned research from Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins and Hall (2014) and Carlson and Widamann (1988) who found that studying abroad provides students the opportunity to become a part of a community-centered learning approach, in which they learn about the values of inclusion and collaboration and on a first-hand basis, and further reduce ethnocentrism and nationalism.

Knowledge of poverty in Africa. Counseling research that suggests that prolonged contact and daily interactions with people of diverse communities can help counseling students to both understand and appreciate the struggles and assets of diverse communities. Research also suggests that, by being acquainted with the foreign environment and becoming familiar with the new surroundings, students can learn to identify the social, political, cultural and environmental and structural issues that members of the hosts country face (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; Carlson & Widaman 1988). This theme supports these research findings. While all seven participants endorsed having expectations to see and witness poverty while in Africa, when participants were asked “What did you notice about prestige, power and privilege during your experience?” during the interview, their responses also demonstrate how their actual understanding and perceptions surrounding the poverty issue in Africa changed as a result of being exposed to it first-hand while abroad. For example, Elaine explains that
what she expected to experience in terms of poverty was different from what she had actually experienced:

You know, and I think before I left, I mean, I knew there was going to be some extreme poverty…and I think one of the memories that I remember was when we were like touring that area [township] and we had this little, I don’t know if it was a grocery store or what it was, but it had like, fresh meat just sitting out in the heat and like dogs are like running by it and I just looked at it like…it just stuns me. That just kind of made me think like, oh my goodness, like they’re going to get all these bacteria’s because their meat is sitting out. Like they didn’t have the means of accessing things better or healthier…poverty is something that I have learned more about. I mean, I knew to expect poverty but until I really saw it, I mean I didn’t really understand I guess to the extent that it was (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).

Diane also discusses her exposure to poverty in South Africa, but rather than comparing her actual experience of poverty with her initial expectations, Diane compares her exposure to poverty in South Africa to the poverty that she has been exposed to while living in the U.S.:

I definitely expected to see poverty…as far as poverty, like electricity, living conditions, like we have HUD, we have Welfare, we have all these kinds of [governmental support systems] like we have the structural infrastructure to help if somebody in the United States can’t be successful of if they’re struggling. Um, like we have the ability to do that. I feel like in South Africa that doesn’t…it
exists but it’s not nearly on the same level that exists in the U.S. (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015).

Other participants indicated that their initial expectations regarding poverty in Africa had changed to a more positive perception as a result of being exposed to a more industrialized, civilized and economically wealthy Africa. For example, Aubrey states

I didn’t expect like when you went to a restaurant there, I felt like I could have been in a restaurant anywhere. I didn’t expect that. I don’t know what I thought it would feel like umm…but I didn’t expect that. Like sometimes I sort of forgot that I was in Africa and that I wasn’t at home, depending on what we were doing. When we were shopping, I felt like I could have been like shopping at home with my girlfriends (Aubrey, personal communication, September 29, 2015).

Gena also indicates having misperceived Botswana as a country strewn with poverty and wilderness, lacking sophistication and industrialization:

Um, oh what was funny, well I, this actually isn’t really funny because it shows how much I realize like in terms of going there….how [populated] the city actually is…I brought like all casual clothes like you know you’re going to Africa… that sounds awful but like, you know what I had in my mind, and Tato and her friends [of native Botswana] like dressed like, really well like when we would go out and stuff…like you know in clothes just as nice, if not better than, like people that would be going out to like parties at [Ohio University], but I had to go like shopping and buy like nice going out stuff because like I hadn’t be prepared at all in terms of like my wardrobe [laughs] (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).
Both Gena and Aubrey’s responses indicate that that had initial perceptions and personal judgements of Africa to be poor and behind economically, financially and socially in comparison to North America and how they have come to realize as a result of studying abroad that such perceptions not as accurate as they had initially thought, pre-departure, which supports literature suggesting that student’s pre-existing, biases, presumptions or false ideas regarding other cultures can be challenged and transformed as a result of studying abroad (Kottler, 1997). Gena’s response, although it may have been embarrassing at the time during which she had to shop for more formal “nice going out stuff”, could also indicate possible lingering feelings of guilt associated with having held such beliefs regarding the Botswana culture. Students often experience feelings of guilt and discomfort while traveling abroad and when exposed to issues of poverty (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; McDowell, Goessling & Melendez, 2012).

**Knowledge of mental health counseling in Africa.** Another common theme regarding student development of multicultural awareness found in this study is participant knowledge regarding the nature of mental health services and treatment in Africa. When participants were asked to describe their volunteer experiences, several participants discussed their exposure to counseling practices and ideology, including what they perceive to be the cultural views of the people of South Africa and Botswana regarding mental health, barriers in seeking mental health treatment, and the general structure of the mental health system in Africa. While many participants discussed having the ability to facilitate various activities at their volunteer site (such as providing education on HIV/AIDS and safe-sex practices or reading stories and engaging in play exercises with children), such opportunities were limited and did not represent realistic
counseling interventions and treatment. In fact, only one participant was able to endorse volunteering at an agency dedicated solely to providing counseling services to families. Aubrey talks about engaging in her first counseling session with a young female from Botswana:

I actually go to do some on one counseling with a couple people from Botswana. They came in just to like, you know, just to get counseling and I remember this one woman came in and I remember thinking like, ‘Oh my gosh, what am I going to do?’ Like I know I have a Master’s degree and am doing counseling through the [doctoral program], but like she is from a different country and she’s from here and I don’t…and it was like we just talked about her boyfriend and her relationship and it made me feel like, although people have different challenges and you know, [are] from different places and speak different languages…I think when it comes down to it we’re just human and a lot of our problems are very similar problems. You know, we all just like want to have a good relationship. We all want to feel successful. We all want…you know, a lot of the things are very, very similar. Um, but then you have to take into account…environment that people grow up in and you know, culturally and things like that. But…it was very surprising to me how that counseling session could have happened in the United States with somebody from here…I just feel like a lot of these [issues that clients present with in Africa] are real typical. We worry about money although it could be you know, in different ways. You know, we’re worried about our health…almost universal, almost universal (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).
Aubrey’s ability to find a common connection with her client yet remain sensitive to her cultural differences is significant, as research suggests that individuals of ethnic and racial minorities often terminate counseling services prematurely (or fail to seek counseling services altogether) due to factors such as culturally insensitive counselors (Chung & Lin, 1994; Uba, 1994; Zhe, Siu & Xin, 2009). Also, the opportunity for Aubrey to engage in a counseling session with an individual from Botswana is significant in and of itself, as research suggests that another factor that impedes the development of multicultural competency is few opportunities for students to work with individuals of other ethnicities during graduate-level training (Pontetotto, Alexander & Greiger, 1995).

While two others participants expressed having less opportunity to engage in and/or provide counseling services while abroad, they did have enough interactions and involvement with the indigenous people throughout various aspects of the program that allowed them to form a perspective and initial impression the mental health system. For example, while volunteering as a Preacher in Botswana, Fran was able to observe how the central value of religion can be both hindering and supportive in regards to mental health treatment. She states:

I worked with um United Council Churches in Botswana which was a great opportunity for me because um, it was very eye opening for me to experience that quality of community mental health and pastoral care because religion is very, very prevalent in the culture and um, that element of faith is very strong. But, it’s very easy where interpretation can go awry and people are ostracized from their family or origin because of illness, because of HIV because of depression and there’s a lot, there’s a lack of open talk about it so it takes a lot of courage I think
for someone to step forward and try to seek help and going through churches; it’s an alternative that a lot of people seek because they are still, unlike here, there are still community centers of action and focus…people do a lot of things through their churches (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Despite his inability to reach his professional goals of meeting traditional healers during his cultural immersion experience in South Africa, Ben also discusses his impressions of how the philosophy and belief systems of the indigenous people of South Africa (including Black Africans, Whites, Coloureds, and Asians) plays a role into how mental health is viewed:

One of the things that I really wanted to do was spend some time and meet some Sangomas which are like, traditional healers. But, um, so I didn’t really get to do that, but I did get to have enough interaction with indigenous people to get their viewpoints about those kinds of things. How they accepted and saw treatment and how the things that I have been thinking and writing about, kind of western ideas or theories that could be integrated with the traditional human group methods for mental health issues, could be put together. I think that I’ve learned that they’re approachable just like any other client can be (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

Aspect Three: Multicultural Skills

Cultural immersion literature suggests that study abroad experiences emphasize the need for counselors to be culturally sensitive to individuals of various cultures and ethnicities which includes not only developing the awareness and knowledge but also the skills and strategies for working competently and effectively with individuals of various
cultures and ethnicities (Canfield, Low & Hovestadt, 2009; Chung & Bemak, 2002; Kim, 2015; Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angelmeler & Zenk, 1994b; Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall, 2014). Achievement of multicultural skills is also the third aspect of multicultural competency identified in Sue, Arredondo and McDavis’ foundational model (1992). In response to the question “How do you think your experience studying abroad will influence your work as a multicultural counselor?”, four common themes emerged that made reference to acquiring appropriate intervention skills and strategies for working with multicultural clients include: 1) Open-mindedness, Understanding, Compassion, and Empathy, 2) Increased comfort in Interacting with Individuals of other Races and Ethnicities, and 3) Acknowledgement for Need of Continuing Education.

**Open-mindedness, understanding, compassion and empathy.** Literature suggests that one critical aspect to demonstrating multicultural skills and sensitivity is the ability to recognize different perspectives and ways of life and to be able to “identify one’s worldview as distinct from the worldview of others” (McDowell, Goessling & Melendez, 2012; Sue and Sue, 1999). An important competency to recognizing different perspectives is also the ability to appreciate and accept other cultures’ values, customs and beliefs as “not right or wrong but simply different” (Matz, 1997). This theme supports such literature as all participants indicated or made at least some reference as to how the study abroad experience helped them to recognize and to become more open, understanding and accepting of the perspectives and worldviews of others. For example, Elaine’s reports that through observing the daily morning routine of her roommate and
fellow peer of the Counseling program, she now has an increased ability to be more understanding of and sensitive to individuals of other cultures, races and ethnicities:

[I am] a little more educated and open-minded about the cultures we deal with around here. It definitely opened my eyes to other cultures, but it opened my eyes into even like the African Americans as well. Like living with [an African American female peer while abroad] for five weeks and seeing her process of her daily tasks and stuff. I mean, it opened my eyes because I have never seen, even lived, with anyone that’s African American. Um, so in terms of you know, how she took care of her hair and…this and that, really opened my eyes which definitely helps me work with my students who have hygiene issues and…You know, just in general, just obviously with the Africa culture as well. It kind of makes you more open, more understanding and when you are educated about those things you can understand and help people better (Elaine, personal communication, October 11, 2015).

The experience in which Elaine attributes to having developed a widened perspective and becoming more open-minded of people of other cultures and ethnicities (via living with a roommate of African-American descent for the first-time) is unique from other participants’. For many, this learning occurred through experiencing difficult and uncomfortable situations, such as being exposed to prejudice and discrimination while abroad. Diane, who self-identifies as Native American, discusses an unsettling experience she endured during a farm exhibition in which the White farm-owners hired Black female “domestic workers” (as they women were referred to by the farm-owners) to serve Diane and the rest of the group throughout their weekend stay. She describes
how this experience has allowed her to view racism that occurs in Africa differently than how she views racism that occurs in the United States:

The thing is, I know racism exists in the United States and I’m definitely more aware of it now since I went to South Africa. Before that, um, I’ve experienced it I guess, but it never really affected me. Now I think, I can look at it from a perspective of…Like where Africa is at [in regards to social progress] (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015).

Like Diane, Stacey also discussed being exposed to prejudice and discrimination while abroad as she states “There were several incidents where [Black Africans] were really mean to [the program leader at University of Botswana] and saying things to him in a derogatory manner because he was with all these White people in this predominately [Black] African club (Stacey. personal communication, September 28, 2015).” However, she also discloses having at least two personal experiences which she believes was discrimination for being a White, American female in Africa:

There were a couple incidents like, where I was at a water fountain and people wouldn’t let me have anything to drink and I…and you know, and I felt like they were laughing at me and you know, there was just some really uncomfortable positions of what it was like to be in the racial minority which I never experienced until now. And you know, even traveling to South Africa, I went to a World Cup Soccer game with people that I work with and at the border, some men were saying some derogatory things about women…So there were like some really uncomfortable situations that I was in that I had really strong emotional reactions to and you know, it's hard…I also feel like it’s given me insight of what it’s like to
be a minority. I mean, as a female I am a minority in terms of gender, but then to have that kind of double intersect and be a female and a white female in a place that was you know, out of my comfort zone (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

Stacey continues on to state how such an experience fostered a greater understanding of the types of situations that individuals of minority populations endure on a daily basis and the empathy she developed as a result of having such a level of understanding:

I really feel like I have a lot…not that I didn’t have compassion and empathy for people of [individuals of racial/ethnic minorities] before, but it gives me this…. I feel like it gives me a little bit more of an idea of what it must be like on a daily basis [to be a minority]. Whereas before I could be like ‘that must be tough’… but I really…I wasn’t ever in that situation… I think I am more aware of the context that we live in and how that plays into people internalizing different minority statues… I was over there for month, but then I came back and I was the majority again, right? Like, and that was it. So, what is it like for people over time to be in the minority, intersected minority, and I would say for multiple things... And over time what does that do? I knew that minority was only temporary. And what's it like for people to live and be the minority permanently. You know, when even that's all they ever know (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).

Aubrey also reflects on the discomforting experience of being declined a hair-cut at a local beauty salon, and how this attributed to her insight of how individuals of a minority population are often unfairly treated:
I felt discriminated against um...I don’t know if how…what…race or just the face we were outsiders. I remember when I went to go get my hair cut one time….And um…siting there in this like barbershop like waiting to get my hair cut and they kept passing me up and um….Finally a woman who was from Botswana said to me, “You know, you just have to go because they’re never going to call you.” And um…I just…I felt like I didn’t know how to feel. Like I felt very like. Like everyone was looking at me kind of…I don’t know. It was like…I was like sometimes I felt…uh, like picked out because we didn’t belong there and was discriminated against because of that, but then in other ways um…I also felt like I couldn’t be mad when that happened. Like I felt like…You know, I remember feeling when we were there, that this is how people of minority races feel in the United States (Aubrey, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

While Diane and Stacey argue that the discrimination in which they were exposed to and/or experienced is clearly attributed to race and gender, however Aubrey seems to continue to question the primary reason as to “why” she was being discriminated against.

While she declines having experienced feelings of discrimination during her time in Botswana, Gena also having developed some insight in regards to what a minority member might experience while in a dominant group of individuals, and demonstrates how such insight has elicited feelings of sensitivity and empathy for individuals of minority populations:

I think what was really impactful to me was actually walking around with Tato [a native of Botswana] and like be friends with her and be a minority. That was, I, I don’t think you really call that a cultural difference, it was really just a like
immersion experience of actually being the minority in like a group and we would go out to like some bars and things like that in the area and it was just interesting to actually experience something from that perspective of being like the minority…It helped heighten my awareness and maybe my like sensitivity and empathy of what someone may experience here in the United States and gave me a better sense of maybe comfort that someone might have when they feel like they’re like that….not someone who immediately appears to be a part of the group, so, well it’s been eye-opening (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Although such experiences may have been difficult for students to endure, each response from Diane, Stacey, Aubrey and Gena reflects not only increased understanding and open-mindedness but also increased feelings of compassion, sensitivity and empathy for individuals of other cultures, races and ethnicities. Other participants, such as Fran, also discusses having become accepting of others’ as a result of the cultural immersion experience:

I think probably um, I’d sheepishly like to say that I’m a compassionate person already or I was already, but I think maybe the levels of empathy that I have were elevated…and, um, maturity in the sense of not expecting what I thought people should act like or be like…Um, some letting go (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

These statements support Counselor Education literature that suggests the ability for studying abroad to influence student culturally sensitivity (Canfield, Low & Hovestadt, 2009). Additionally, the participant’s reflections regarding having such developing such
acceptance and open-mindedness as a result of the study abroad experience may suggest that they were not as sensitive or understanding of individuals of other cultures before the experience occurred, which has also been reflected in Counselor Education literature by Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall (2014).

**Increased comfort in interacting with individuals of other races and ethnicities.** Research also suggests that through students’ broadened perspectives and visions of the world, students engaging in a cultural immersion experience become more tolerant in their approach to the issues of others and are better prepared to understand the influence of culture on behavior (Carlson & Wideman, 1988, Chung & Bemak, 2002; Lambert, 1989; Kim, 2015). The responses by participants in this study represent these findings, as participants discuss how their broadened perspective transformed their ability to feel more comfortable in interacting with individuals from other cultures and ethnicities, even in discussing sensitive issues such as end-of-life issues and racism.

Gena best discusses how the cultural immersion experience has provided her with increased awareness due to the fact that before the experience occurred, she struggled with demonstrating empathy and understanding to individuals of minority populations. Specifically, Gena talks about how the experience of being a minority while abroad affects the way in which she now interacts with and responds to others:

My husband is uh biracial and he like used to and still likely laughingly make comments when we’re out somewhere and he’ll say like, “I was, I’m the only like black person in the group.” And like not that I laughed at him before but I just always kind of took it as like for a joke or like it’s not a big deal. And um, and he always said it in like a joking way so it’s not like I was as you know like
misinterpreting like the way he was making the comment, but I think like [the experience of being a minority] did make me a little more aware that like maybe I was a little extra conscious of how I represent myself because I didn’t want to be a bad example of someone either from my race or like from the United States…maybe I was a little extra aware of how I presented myself (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Gena continues on to express that since she experienced being a White minority member amongst a prominent Black African population, she has reacted differently to her husband at times during which he refers to himself as a minority:

Sometimes, when he [refers to himself as a minority], I will actually ask him a question…Um, maybe like you know, “Are you okay? Like how do you feel about that?” and usually he will kind of laugh it off but I think it made me like care a little more (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Gena not only states that she feels more comfortable in talking sensitive issues in her personal life with her husband, but also in her professional life with clients, as she explains: “I would say overall it probably most directly impacted my comfort level with discussing um, like life impacting, I don't want to say just terminal, but like really life impacting and terminal illnesses with a person (Gena, personal communication. October 21, 2015).

Fran also discusses how the cultural immersion experience has increased her comfort in interacting with individuals of other races and ethnicities by stating:

I think it has definitely encouraged me to ask. To be able to be a little more comfortable in just asking questions. And going, like ‘Tell me a little bit more
about that.” And not like, from a micro-skilled point of view. So, to really exhibit genuine curiosity in what makes up an individual. I think that, there is a skill I learned there (Fran, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Similarly, Stacey states that because of her prolonged exposure to the diverse cultures of the people of South Africa:

I’m more open…I guess I feel more comfortable talking about issues of you know, diversity. I think I definitely feel more comfortable talking about things about race, about gender, about disability, about religion, about all these…I am very open about conversations (Stacey, personal communication, September 28, 2015).”

Ben also mentions having increased comfort in talking with individuals to other races and ethnicities he also refers to the desire to ask questions and acknowledgement of his need to learn more:

I think my experiences abroad, this is definitely, where this crystallized for me; I don’t have a problem going up to someone and saying, ‘So I’ve got a question. I’d like to know more.’ I’ve got confidence that I can go to someone, to be able to do that in a way that I don’t feel is an insult…I can put myself in a situation where I admit freely, that I am ignorant and that I need enlightened and this individual here is the one who could enlighten me (Ben, personal communication, September 25, 2015).

This theme indicates that as a result of the study abroad experience, participants now feel more comfortable and confident in interacting with individuals of other cultures, including addressing and conversing about sensitive topics and issues. These findings
support Counselor Education literature which suggests that, through the course of meeting people from diverse culture and experiencing challenges of foreign travel, students become more effective in interacting and effectively communicating with individuals of such populations in the future (Franklin 2010; Kim, 2015).

Acknowledgement for the need for continued education. The final theme in the third aspect of the multicultural counseling competency model of Multicultural Skills is student acknowledgement of the need for continued education. Three participants elaborated on the central concept of multicultural competency, including Fran who describes multicultural competency as a professional skill that must consistently be worked toward although may never fully be achieved, although counselors should never stop trying to make valid efforts in becoming more competent in learning about and working with individuals of other races, ethnicities and cultures.

In a similar manner, Diane refers to the skills of multicultural competency as something that is complex due the abundance variation amongst, within and across cultures. More importantly, Diane emphasizes that notion that, although a counselor might be knowledgeable about a client’s cultural beliefs, values and worldviews, focusing on the person as individual remains of central importance in the counseling process:

Even within South Africa, just in South Africa general the region, there is so [sic] many tribes and so many traditions. Um...and so many different points of views and religions and I mean, it's just crazy. Like people always say that America's the melting pot, but there is so many cultures in other places. Um...and even if it's a small area. Like I know people talk about like, you should need a passport to get to Texas because it is so different than Cali and so different than New York and all
these different regions of the U.S. are very, very different and I agree with that, but I think it's important to remember that, other countries are just, their very similar. Um... And I met different people and they believe in different things and...
So, I think cultural competency is just always a number that you got to start from a very person-centered kind of understanding their point of view and...it just kind of proves that you can’t make assumptions (Diane, personal communication, September 29, 2015).

Gena expresses her own perspective on the need for continued education in developing multicultural competency by emphasizing the importance of continued research and education:

So I think before I thought being multicultural competent meant just being um, really open to cultural differences and willing to accept to like cultural differences…and being open to things that maybe are taboo in our culture…I think maybe the um, study abroad program taught me a little bit that above and beyond that; that being multic和平urally competent, probably should involve like actual research on may those cultural differences if you’re going to be working with that population, so instead of just saying you know as a counselor that ‘I’m accepting of others’ and that ‘I’m open to cultural differences’, actually finding out what those cultural differences are, maybe are in a population that you are working heavily with (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

Ben reinforces Gena’s expressed need for research regarding individuals of other cultures by stating “I am aware that I need to be more knowledgeable…that applies from being a
clinician or a Counselor Educator...when I have student that is from a different culture, I’m willing to be a student (Gena, personal communication, October 21, 2015).

The responses by Ben, Gena, Diane and Fran supports the central concept of multicultural competency as summarized by Sue and Sue (1990) who emphasized that: Becoming culturally skilled is an active process, that is ongoing, and that it is a process that never reaches an end point. Implicit is recognition of the complexity and diversity of the client and client populations, and acknowledgement of our own personal limitations and the need to always improve (p. 146).

Summary

This section provided an introduction to participants and salient themes that emerged during participant interviews across three aspects of multicultural competency development (i.e., knowledge, awareness and skills). The research investigation revealed twelve emerging themes: 1) Knowledge of Personal Biases, Presumptions and False Ideas, 2) Knowledge of Self, 3) Awareness of Economic Privilege, 4) Changed View of American Culture, 5) Knowledge of HIV/AIDS, 6) Knowledge of African Culture, 7) Knowledge of People of Africa, 8) Knowledge of Poverty, 9) Knowledge of Prejudice and Discrimination, 10) Open-Mindedness, Understanding, Compassion and Empathy, 11) Increased Comfort in Interacting with Individuals of Other Races and Ethnicities, and 12) Acknowledgement for Need of Continuing Education. This section included description of these eight themes and included discussion of published literature to support the emerging themes. The next section will describe how these themes can answer the central research questions, followed by a discussion of researching findings.
including recommendations for future research and implications for Counselor Education programs.
Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Discussion

In the previous chapter the themes that emerged during the research investigation in relation to the lived experiences of each of the seven research participants were discussed. This section describes how the themes answer the two central research questions: 1) What are the experiences of graduate-level counseling students participating in an international cultural immersion program, and 2) How do the experiences of engaging in an in international cultural immersion program change or alter the development of multicultural competency in graduate level counseling students?

Experiences of participating in cultural immersion. The first of the two research questions was developed in order to identify what the experiences are of graduate level counseling students participating in cultural immersion: what they experience emotionally, physically, and mentally in relation to various factors such as the study abroad program curriculum, opportunities to engage in community service, participation in leisure activities, group discussions, reflections with peers on experiences, and the ability to interact with individuals of the international country.

Based on the evidence collected from conducting in-depth interviews with seven counseling students of whom have participated in a cultural immersion program to Africa during their graduate training, it is suggested that counseling students have preconceived presumptions, personal biases, and false ideas regarding the foreign country (including the people and culture) before departure. Such presumptions, personal biases and false ideas that participants described in this study primarily surrounded the geographical make-up of the region (such as for the landscape to be flat and dry) in addition to aspects
surrounding the foreign people and culture (for example, that males are the patriarchs and are responsible for being the primary bread-winners. Participants described how being immersed in the cultures of South Africa and Botswana for a period of five weeks compelled them to challenge such preconceived expectations, personal biases, and false ideas. While such challenging of beliefs led to feelings described as confusion, embarrassment and/or guilt, participants reported being afforded the time and space to reflect upon and process such contradictions which led to an increased understanding of their tendency to falsely judge others and/or how they project personal viewpoints, opinions, and beliefs upon others. This supports research asserting that students have pre-existing stereotypes in addition to biases, beliefs, and prejudices of other cultures that develop through social upbringing or background but that, as a result of cultural immersion experiences, students are able to identify the sources of their values and biases, to critique their own values, norms and practices, and to become more aware with the stereotypes and views they hold of others who are different from oneself (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990; D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Hood & Arceneaux, 1987; Kottler, 1997, McDowell, Goessling & Melendez, 2012; West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta, & Templeton, 2011; Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins, & Hall, 2014; Tomlinson-Claarke & Clarke, 2010).

From this study, it was also found that graduate-level counseling students engaging in cultural immersion also experience an array of emotions, described as both positive and negative, surrounding traveling to and being placed in a foreign, international environment for a prolonged period of time. Emotions most commonly described by participants in this study include fear and anxiety (occurring both pre-
departure in not knowing what to expect upon arrival and while abroad during direct exposure to unfamiliar situations and environments), feeling vulnerable or taken advantage of (particularly while experiencing being a member of the minority population first-hand, not understanding the spoken foreign language, and/or visiting townships in which crime and violence were prevalent), and feelings of shame or guilt (after witnessing and being exposed to critical third-world issues such as poverty and illness).

Specifically, participants expressed feeling economically, financially and/or educationally privileged, primarily as a result of newly developed insight regarding the abundance of resources that they have as Americans (e.g., the ability to travel abroad, the opportunity to obtain college-level education, or the opportunity to have access to healthcare). One participant voiced feeling guilty for not being able to help the people of Africa on a larger scale than the volunteer work she had completed working with individuals with HIV/AIDS and other illnesses or disabilities. This supports research indicating that as American students are exposed to real-life struggles of a third-world culture they develop an increased recognition for the privilege they hold as American, and that feeling accountable and/or socially responsible for helping to resolve the issue accompanies such increased recognition (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; McDowell, Goessling & Malendez, 2012; Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007). Furthermore, this refutes research found in cultural immersion literature asserting that despite the amount of time spent in a foreign culture, students remain resistant to acknowledging their position of privilege (Butin, 2005a, 2005b; Jones, Gilbrid-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005; Themundo, Page & Bendander, 2007).
Increased recognition and awareness of such privilege may be the contributing factor as to why five of the seven participants in this study voiced having developed a changed view of the American culture and people as a result the cultural immersion experience. Upon returning to the U.S., these participants described feeling frustrated, angry, and resentful for the perceived lack of knowledge and insight that other Americans held regarding the hardships and challenges faced by those living in Africa. These emotions were triggered by situations in which the participants were exposed to seemingly “everyday” situations, (such as listening to strangers complain about a lack of paper towels in the public restroom or shopping at a major grocery store and being confronted with an abundance of items available for purchase), in addition to having conversations with other Americans of whom were perceived by the participants as having a lack of education or were insensitive to issues such HIV/AIDS. This supports current research suggesting that cultural immersion experiences may have a negative impact on one’s sense of cultural identity, as they become more aware of the cultural encapsulation in which they were raised (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Themundo, Page & Benander, 2007). Additionally, the difficulty and struggle described by these participants may add to the current body of literature in the counseling field that indicates students engaging in prolonged international travel often experience unique difficulties and struggles upon their return home, as they attempt to transition and adjust to normal life (Kostohyrz, Wathen, Wells and Wilson, 2014; Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke, 2010).

However, this study demonstrates that graduate-level counseling students also experience many positive feelings while immersed in a foreign culture, as participants in this study recalled specific moments of joy and appreciation for feeling as though they
have made an impact or difference in the life of someone else. Additionally, while cultural immersion experience was described as stressful and challenging at times, participants described now having an increased awareness of their personal strength and newfound self-confidence for having successfully functioned in a foreign environment for a prolonged period, which aligns with existing research by Cressy (2000) and Themundo, Page, and Benander, (2007). Regardless, interview responses indicate that both negative and positive emotions experienced by participants in this study throughout the course of the cultural immersion experience fostered the development of self-awareness, supporting an abundance of counseling literature supports the notion that cultural immersion is a unique experience of which inherently elicits student development of knowledge of oneself, one’s own cultural context, and oneself in relation to others (Burnett, Hamel & Long; 2004; Fouad & Arredondo, 2003; Platt, 2012; West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011; Williams, 2003).

A critical aspect to development of self-awareness in this study as described by participants was the ability to appropriately process such emotions (and the relevant experiences that triggered such emotions) through means such as reflective journal writing, informal discussions with peers, or structured weekly group discussions (facilitated by the program leader). Participants reported that the processing of such experiences and stressors also influenced bonding amongst peers in addition to providing the opportunity for students to learn from one another (e.g., in regards to cultural knowledge, participants in this study voiced how having the opportunity to hear about the volunteer experiences of their peers at other community agencies or organizations helped them learn about other aspects regarding the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS in
Participants reported feeling particularly safe and comfortable in processing such experiences with a supportive program leader, of whom was readily available to students for immediate support or with assistance in meeting acquired needs. This supports research by Brown (1995) whom stresses the critical role that program leaders play in encouraging and validating students’ reflections of their experiences and that such processing is a necessary factor in student development of self-awareness.

In addition to the emotional experiences influencing the development of self-awareness, students participated in a variety of both structured, formal activities (include attending lectures and seminars at the international university, completing volunteer work, attending weekly group processing sessions, and completing curriculum assignments) and unstructured, informal activities (such as going out to restaurants, shopping at local markets, attending church or other religious ceremonies, attending sporting and/or other social events, traveling to museums or historical sites, and visiting with locals) throughout the cultural immersion program. However, it was determined through participant responses to interview questions that the most meaningful aspect of participating in a cultural immersion experience, from the graduate counseling students’ perspective in this study, is the opportunity to have direct interactions and to develop close, meaningful relationships with people of the foreign culture. It was through developing such friendships and relationships, and having such interactions with individuals different from oneself, that participants began to embrace, accept, understand and empathize with them. Participants also reported that such interactions afforded them the opportunity to now feel more comfort in interacting and engaging with individuals of not only other cultures and ethnicities, but also with individuals of other races, in both the
personal and professional environment. This is significant as these findings demonstrate participant’s development of multicultural sensitivity and skills via cultural immersion, as is indicated in counseling literature suggesting that, through the course of meeting people of diverse cultures, students become more effective in interacting and effectively communicating with individuals of such populations in the future (Franklin, 2010; Kim, 2015).

**Development of multicultural competency.** The second research question that guided this qualitative study asked “How do the experiences of engaging in an international cultural immersion experience change or alter the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students? This question can be answered by utilizing the foundational model of multicultural competency by Sue, Arrendondo and McDavis (1992) that defines multicultural competency: 1) multicultural knowledge (knowledge regarding one’s own culture, beliefs, values, biases and/or attitudes), 2) multicultural awareness (awareness of others’ cultural values, customs, expectations, and worldviews), and 3) multicultural skills (skills appropriate for working effectively with multicultural clients).

First, counseling students in this study described: a) the development of multicultural knowledge as knowledge of their personal biases, presumptions and false ideas regarding Africa and the African culture and people, b) having an increased knowledge of self, c) developing an increased awareness of own economic privilege in comparison to those living in Africa, and as d) having a newly developed and/or changed perspective regarding their own, American culture as a result of the cultural immersion experience in Africa. Interestingly, all participants in this study identified having
presumptions, personal biases, and false ideas regarding Africa, including its’ culture and people, despite that they had each successfully completed not only the graduate-level multicultural counseling course as required by university’s Counselor Education program, but also the five-week orientation session in which they were provided with a wealth of knowledge regarding Africa including its culture and people. This is significant as it supports research indicating that in the classroom, graduate-level counseling students may withdraw, deny or resist confronting such presumptions, biases, and false ideas, particularly as they may not have time to process such feelings, yet via cultural immersion students are exposed to evidence that directly contradicts their falsely preconceived notions, thereby forcing them to identify, reflect upon and question the source of their values and biases; a process in which move beyond resistance and to increased self-awareness (Alexander, Kruczke & Ponteototto, 2005; Fouad & Arrendondo, 2003; Ishii et al., 2009; Jackson 1999; Ponterotto, 1998; Smith-Augustine, Dowden, Wiggins & Hall, 2014; Tomlinson-Clarke & Wang, 1999) Themundo, Benander & Page, 2007; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; West, Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta & Templeton, 2011). For these reasons, it may be said that direct exposure to a foreign culture and its people is the only method for refuting initial presumptions, biases, and false ideas in graduate-level counseling students.

Secondly, counseling students in this study described developing multicultural awareness as having developing increased knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, knowledge regarding the nature of mental health services and treatment in Africa, knowledge of the various customs, beliefs, religions, traditions and other aspects regarding the African culture, and an increased understanding and awareness of critical
issues in Africa include poverty, racism, prejudice and discrimination. Such a level of multicultural awareness was described by participants as having been obtained through experiences such as visiting and volunteering at agencies or organizations for those affected by HIV/AIDS or other diseases or disabilities, attending lectures at the university or listening to the stories of local experts and by attending various formal (e.g. organized tour of local township) and informal (e.g., attending a soccer game) social and cultural events. This supports research by West-Olantunji, Goodman, Mehta, and Templeton (2012) suggest that gaining such a level of awareness involves extended exposure to the culture and the ability to “witness the community’s authentic voice” (p. 344). These findings also support other research indicating that there are several unique aspects to cultural immersion that are significant to student development of multicultural awareness, including having the ability to listen to demonstrations and engaging in lectures with local scholars, and that, by becoming with familiar with the foreign culture, including its struggles and assets, that students learn to identify various social, political and other issues that members of the foreign country experience (Barden, Shannonhouse & Mobley, 2015; Boyle-Baise, 2002; Carlson & Widaman, 1998; Guth, McAuliffe & Michalak, 2014; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Mather, 2008; Monard-Weissman, 2003; O’Graade, 2000; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).

Finally, counseling students in this study described developing multicultural skills in the areas of being more open-minded, understanding, compassionate and empathic towards individuals of other cultures and by feeling more confident and comfortable in interacting and talking with individuals of other races and ethnicities. Cultural sensitivity, or the ability to be more open, understanding and accepting to the
perspectives and worldviews of others, is a critical aspect to demonstrating multicultural skills and has been supported in Counselor Education literature (Canfield, Low & Hovestadt, 2009; Matz, 1997; McDowell, Goessling & Malendez, 2012; Sue & Sue, 1999). For these participants, developing such a level of understanding and acceptance of individuals of other cultures occurred through new, yet particularly difficult and uncomfortable situations (such as being exposed to or experiencing prejudice or discrimination) while abroad. Participants further reported that such experiences broadened their perspective of the world which also assisted students in feeling more comfortable in interacting with individuals of the South African population, even in discussing potentially sensitive issues such as end-of-life care and racism.

Although students indicated that they had perceived such advancement in their abilities to understanding, demonstrate increased empathy and interact more comfortably with individuals of other cultures and ethnicities, concern remains over their ability to integrate multicultural skills and behaviors in counseling practice. This is in agreement with findings by D’Andrea, Daniels and Heck (1991) that suggests multicultural skill development is the most difficulty of the three aspects (knowledge, awareness and skills) to achieve. Additionally, in this study such learning occurred as a result of each of the seven students’ voiced experiences with being a minority and/or witnessing prejudice or discrimination on various levels include race, gender, or other reasons (such as economic privilege as an American). While six of the seven participants identify as Caucasian (and traditionally Caucasians are less able to recognize and understand the realities of multicultural clients and less likely to identify themselves as culturally “different”), it should be noted that the seventh participant, of whom identified as Native American, also
talked in-depth of her experience with being discriminated against, feeling taken advantage of and heightened awareness regarding the issues of racism in South Africa.

Lastly, students acknowledged that, although they spent five weeks immersed in the African culture, they are not fully competent in working with individuals of the African population as a result of this single cultural immersion experience. For example, despite that students were exposed to the commonly spoken languages of Afrikaans and Setswana during their cultural immersion experience, students continued to lack fluency in such languages which for some, created feelings of fear and anxiety. This will be a significant barrier that these participants in the event that they are asked to provide counseling services to individuals of the African population. Additionally, some participants discussed personal experiences in foreign travel that occurred outside of the cultural immersion experience under study, and how such experiences also contributed to their development of multicultural knowledge and awareness. Still, students expressed desire to engage in more activities and have more exposure to the indigenous culture (with the intention of increasing their learning) while abroad. As Sue and Sue (1990) suggest, students acknowledge that true multicultural competency may never actually be achieved. For these reasons, continued multicultural education and research is needed.

**Research Implications**

Existing research consistently demonstrates that a lack of multiculturally competent counselors are currently practicing across the U.S. and that, despite the significant attempts and efforts to train multiculturally competent counselors in the classroom, (such as the incorporation of a single multicultural counseling course), such traditional methods may no longer be an sufficient and effective means for eliciting
multicultural competency development in students (Atkinson, Morten and Sue; 1989; Sue & Sue 1990, Heppner & Brian, 1994). Based on these findings, this research was completed to contribute to the body of knowledge to assist Counselor Education programs, Counselor Educators and cultural immersion program leaders with the process influencing graduate-level counseling student development of multicultural competency in the future.

**Implications for Counselor Education programs and Counselor Educators.**

For Counselor Education programs and Counselor Educators, this research suggests that cultural immersion can be a sufficient method for eliminating the barriers found to exist in traditional teaching methods (including student withdrawal, denial and resistance in the classroom, the accentuation of pre-existing biases, prejudices or false ideas, and/or a struggle in providing an educational balance across the multicultural elements of knowledge, awareness and skills) of multicultural competency training and education. The various aspects of the cultural immersion experience that students described as most influential in their development of multicultural competency includes experiential learning experiences, such as real-life exposure to the circumstances and situations of individuals of diverse cultures (such as poverty, illness, and discrimination). While many programs may likely already incorporate experiential learning activities into the classroom, such opportunities are time and/or resource-limited and thus students may not be developing and/or learning at their full potential through the use of such activities. This can be supported by the fact that, despite that the seven participants in this study had successfully taken and passed the single multicultural education course in their graduate curriculum before departure, (of which included experiential learning activities such as
guest speakers and/or multicultural panels). Participants in this study attributed much of their multicultural competency development (such as increased open-mindedness, understanding, compassion and empathy, and increased comfort in interacting with individuals different from oneself) to the international immersion experience.

For these reasons, it is suggested that Counselor Education programs may consider either incorporating a cultural immersion program into their current program curriculum or implement an opportunity for students to directly engage with individuals of other cultures and ethnicities over a prolonged period of time. This could be achieved by attempting to recruit for a multi-culturally diverse faculty, which is particularly important as best practices for multicultural competency training recommend that at least 30% of the faculty (and student) population be of minority status, yet still current statistics show that most Counselor Education programs fail to meet this recommendation (Sue Arrendondo & McDavis, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Also, because the development of multicultural sensitivity (such as open-mindedness, understanding, compassion and empathy and ability to interact more comfortably with individuals of other cultures and ethnicities) occurred through both formal (structured) and informal (unstructured) interactions, it is further recommended that Counselor Education programs also incorporate opportunities for students to engage with culturally and ethnically diverse populations both the formal (classroom or field experiences) and informal settings (outside of the classroom). Informal examples may include attending international fairs or joining an international social club on campus. Formal examples may include student field placement at an agency, organization or school in which they will be exposed to clients of cultures and ethnicities different from
their own. This would require that Counselor Education programs form collaborations with agencies, organizations and schools that are outside the students’ immediate geographical surroundings and cultural or ethnic background and that Counselor Educators play a larger role in student application to practicum and internship sites to assist students in going out of their comfort zone and to take advantage of such opportunities and practicum and internship site supervisors also play a role in identifying and recognizing student emotional conflict that may become a potential barrier to overall competency.

Despite that there is yet a universal model regarding the most effective method for multicultural competency training, Counselor Education programs remain accountable for ensuring that not only are their students prepared to work in a multiculturally diverse world (thereby demonstrating multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills), but also that they are meeting the ethical and professional standards of various agencies such as CACREP and the ACA. Because research indicates that practicum and internship is a time in which students may display the earliest signs of potential barriers regarding their ability to demonstrate professionalism in response to sensitive issues of diversity and social justice, the cultural immersion experience may be an additional opportunity (similar to that of practicum and internship) for Counselor Education programs to meet such demands as well as act professional gatekeepers by a) screening students prior to departure for potentially unethical behavior or multicultural insensitivity, and by b) assessing student progress of multicultural competency development before, during and after the cultural immersion experience. If Counselor Education programs, including counselor Educators, were to take on such a role could ensure that, through such exposure
to diverse populations all students of graduate-level Counselor Education programs could become more effective, comfortable and competent in working with a diverse clientele in the future.

**Implications for cultural immersion program leaders.** For cultural immersion programs leaders facilitating such experiences, this study supports current literature suggesting that students engaging in prolonged international travel experience unique difficulties and struggles upon their return home, as they attempt to transition and adjust to normal life. Students make particular mention of feeling frustrated and less tolerant of others who not only do not understand the benefits and challenges of their experience, but also fail to recognize how they themselves have changed. To expand upon the recommendations of Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) and Kostohyrz, Wathen, Wells and Wilson (2014), cultural immersion program leaders can help advocate for student wellness during this phase by preparing students for their return home (through such activities as pre-departure journaling and re-entry discussions throughout the experience), educating student support networks and others about the benefits and challenges of such an experience, and advocating and providing professional research to increase awareness and knowledge regarding student reentry. Also, although not significantly emphasized, students also voiced frustration over logistical matters that could be avoided in a practical manner such as disorganization and lack of structure in the program curriculum. Lastly, it may be suggested that cultural immersion program leaders attempt to create a safe and supportive environment for students while abroad, as findings from this study indicate that doing so can increase student comfort in discussing and processing particularly difficult experiences that they endured while abroad.
**Recommendations for Future Research**

The current study attempted to generate a rich, thick description of Master’s and Doctoral-level graduate counseling student participating in a five-week international cultural immersion program. The researcher used a qualitative research design to answer two central research questions: 1) What are the experiences of graduate-level counseling students participating in an international cultural immersion program, and 2) How do the experiences of engaging in an international cultural immersion program change or alter the development of multicultural competency in graduate-level counseling students?

Recommendations for future research may include:

1) Future studies could examine how individual factors such as age, gender, marriage status, previous cultural immersion experience (etc.) affects student experiences while immersed in a foreign culture and how such factors support or hinder addition to the development of multicultural competency.

2) Future studies could include the cultural immersion program leader’s observations and evaluations of student development of multicultural competency through the immersion experience.

3) Future quantitative studies might measure students’ multicultural competency before, during and after the cultural immersion experience occurred using empirically-sound instruments and measures.

4) Future quantitative studies could examine the long-term effects of cultural immersion experiences upon counselor student development, including the ability to incorporate multicultural skills and interventions immediately after the experience and later.
Conclusion

In summary, multicultural competency is not only an important but a vital factor in the training of today’s counseling students for various reasons, including to sustain the future field of counseling and to meet the needs of the growing diverse, global population in all areas of the world. While cultural immersion has long been recognized as effective experiential learning methods in disciplines such as English and Communications, only recently are such programs becoming acknowledged in Counselor Education discipline for potentially expanding students’ knowledge and awareness of self and others while developing the skills necessary for working with individuals of diverse cultures and ethnicities. This study suggests that cultural immersion programs, such as those to Botswana and South Africa offered through the Office of Global Studies at Ohio University, can be used to expand counseling students’ development of multicultural competency by broadening their cultural knowledge and awareness and enhancing their ability to provide culturally sensitive skills and interventions. However, given the complexity in understanding how multicultural competency progresses within counseling students and the abundance of research indicating the perceived benefits and drawbacks to cultural immersion, the debate continues as to which method for training counseling students to become multiculturally competent is most effective. Additionally, it remains understood that not all Counselor Education programs can provide opportunities for students to participate in international cultural immersion experiences given limited amount of resources.
References


p%3a%2f%2fsearch.ebscohost.com%2flogin.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26db%3dbt
h%26AN%3d1552353%26site%3deds-live%26scope%3dsite


DOI: 10.1037/0022-0167.46.1.3


http://www.ohio.edu/global/goglobal/programs/south-africa.cfm

Ohio University (2016). History and Traditions: A Brief History of the University. Retrieved from https://www.ohio.edu/students/history.cfm


Ohio University (2016). Focus on Ohio. Enrollment and Freshman Class Information. Retrieved from https://www.ohio.edu/focus/


competency. *The Counseling Psychologist, 38*(5), 691-713. DOI: 10.1177/0011000009360917


Multicultural Counseling and Development, (38), 166-175. DOI: 10.1002/j.2161-1912.2010.tb00124.x


United States Census Bureau (2008). Projected population by single year of age, sex, race and Hispanic origin for the United States: July 1, 2000 to July 1, 2050.
Retrieved from: http://kff.org/disparities-policy/slide/distribution-of-u-s-
population-by-raceethnicity-2010-and-2050/

racism awareness: Training in professional psychology programs*. In G. Bernai, J.
Trimble, A. Burlew, & F. Leong (Eds.), *Handbook of racial & ethnic minority


learning activity in a multicultural counseling course. *Counselor Education &

Development and Multicultural Counseling Competency. *Journal of Multicultural

competence: An outreach immersion experience in Southern Africa. *International
Journal of Counseling*, 33, 335-346. DOI: 10.1007/s10447-011-9138-0

for the sojourning student. International Journal for the Advancement of
Counselling, 9, 221-230. DOI: 10.1007/BF00120243


Appendix A: IRB Approval Form

The following research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(-ies):

7

Project Title: A Phenomenological Study on the Experience of Cultural Immersion in the Development of Multicultural Competency in Graduate-level Counseling Students

Primary Investigator: Danielle Lynn Geigle
Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor: Mona Robinson
(Department):
Counseling and Higher Education

Approval Date: 9-1-15
Expiration Date: 8-31-16

This approval is valid until the expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond the expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your approved application. Any additions or modifications to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.

IRB approval does not supersedother regulatory requirements, such as HIPAA, FERPA, PPRA, etc.

Adverse events/unanticipated problems must be reported to the IRB promptly.
Appendix B: Electronic Consent Form

Title: A Phenomenological Study on the Experience of Cultural Immersion in the Development of Multicultural Competency in Graduate-level Counseling Students

Researcher: Danielle Geigle, M. ED, LPC, Doctoral Student, Counselor Education

Faculty Advisor: Mona Robinson, Ph.D., LPCC-S, LSW, CRC

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected.

Instruction
Before taking part in this study, please read the consent information below if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate in this study.

Explanation of Study
As a participant, you will be asked to engage in two interviews: an initial 60-90 minute interview in which you will be asked to discuss your experience, how you understand and interpret your experience, and what you have learned in regards to personal growth and awareness, your knowledge about the African culture, and what multicultural counseling skills you have learned as a result of the study abroad experience. We will also discuss specific study abroad program features that you may consider to have been supportive or hindering in this development. You will also be requested to share portions of your study abroad journal if you have one. After the initial interview you will be asked to participate in a second 15-30 minute follow-up interview to afford you the opportunity to reflect on the questions asked in the initial interview and/or to add any additional details about your experience. During the interviews, you may refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer or one that makes you feel uncomfortable. Each will be conducted either a) in-person (the researcher will meet with you in-person (at a location that is most convenient to you to conduct the interview) or, b) by distance (the interview will be conducted via electronic methods such as Skype or FaceTime). All interviews will be audio-recorded.

Risks and Discomforts
This research study requires that individuals explore and reflect upon personal attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, biases, prejudices and overall perceptions regarding individuals who are ethnically different from oneself. This process of exploration and reflection can trigger a range of emotions including negative feelings such as shock, guilt, anger and shame. Participants can take a break from the interview at any point or discontinue their participation at any point of the study should they become uncomfortable. The researcher is available to answer any questions that they might have concerning the purpose and subject matter of the study during the duration of their participation. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher will also provide participants with debriefing information that includes CPS’s contact information should they become distressed or upset after
the conclusion of their participation. Also, the researcher will provide participants with his contact information after their participation is complete should they have any additional questions about the research.

**Benefits**
This study is being conducted for the purpose of understanding the development of multicultural competency in counseling students participating in a study abroad experience. The researcher aims to investigate how immersing oneself in a foreign culture supports or hinders a counselor trainee’s ability to work effectively with individuals of other cultures. Your participation will provide an opportunity to reflect on your learning experience of and gains from your study abroad, which would otherwise lie dormant without such reflection. This study could be important to Counselor Education administrators and faculty as it could inform the design and/or improvement of multicultural training in graduate counseling programs. Further understanding of this phenomenon can help current and future practicing counselors in providing superior services to members of ethnic minority groups in the future.

**Confidentiality and Records**
Your study information will not be made known to anyone but the researcher. To keep your information confidential, you will be assigned a pseudonym (i.e., participant #1, participant #2, etc) in order to be identified for the purposes of data analyses. Any data collected (including recorded materials) which result from this study will be stored in the researcher’s personal laptop computer, which is protected by a password that is known only to the researcher. When the computer is not in the direct contact with the researcher, it will be turned off and stored behind two locked doors. Any identifiable data will be maintained until 03/1/2016. Unidentifiable data may be maintained for 3 years if the researcher intends to publish the results of this study. If the results are published, your identity will not be revealed neither will any content contained in the document be traceable to you.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

**Compensation**
As compensation for your time and effort, you will receive a $10.00 gift card at completion of the follow-up interview. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point during the research period. However, no compensation will be provided if you choose to discontinue participation prior to completion.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher,

Danielle Geigle at dg159201@ohio.edu
Telephone No: (740)438-3534
or...

Dr. Mona Robinson (Dissertation Chair) at robinsoh@ohio.edu
Telephone No: (614)288-3142

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, at (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu

By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled

Thank you in advance for your time and participation!

Please do not forward this e-mail to others.

Please print a copy of this document for your records.

Version Date: [08/28/15]
Appendix C: Interview Guide

Basic Demographic Information:

a. What is your age?

b. What is your area of specialization (Clinical Mental Health Counseling, School Counseling, Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling, Counselor Education?)

c. What is your ethnic identity?

d. Which study abroad program and year did you attend?

e. Have you studied abroad before?

   a. If yes, what was the destination and duration of your study abroad program?

Interview Questions:

a. Why did you decide to participate in the study abroad program?

b. What were your expectations of Africa before departure and how did those perceptions change? Describe the group experiences that were most meaningful to you?

c. Describe the individual experiences that were most meaningful to you?

d. What general aspects of the study abroad experience did you like the most and why?

e. What were some of the most stressful moments in the study abroad trip?

f. What did you hope to achieve in regards to personal growth?

g. What did you learn about yourself as a result of this study abroad experience?

h. How comfortable would you say you were with people who are different from you before your study abroad experience?

i. How did your view of the American culture change?

j. How well would you say you know the African culture after this experience?

k. How would you describe your interactions with the local people?
l. To what extent would you say your interactions with local people has changed the way you understand the perspectives and worldviews of the African Culture?
m. What did you notice about prestige, power and discrimination during your experience?
n. What did it mean to you to be multiculturaly competent before engaging in the study abroad experience and how has this meaning changed since your travel?
o. How do you think your experiences will influence your work as a multicultural counselor?